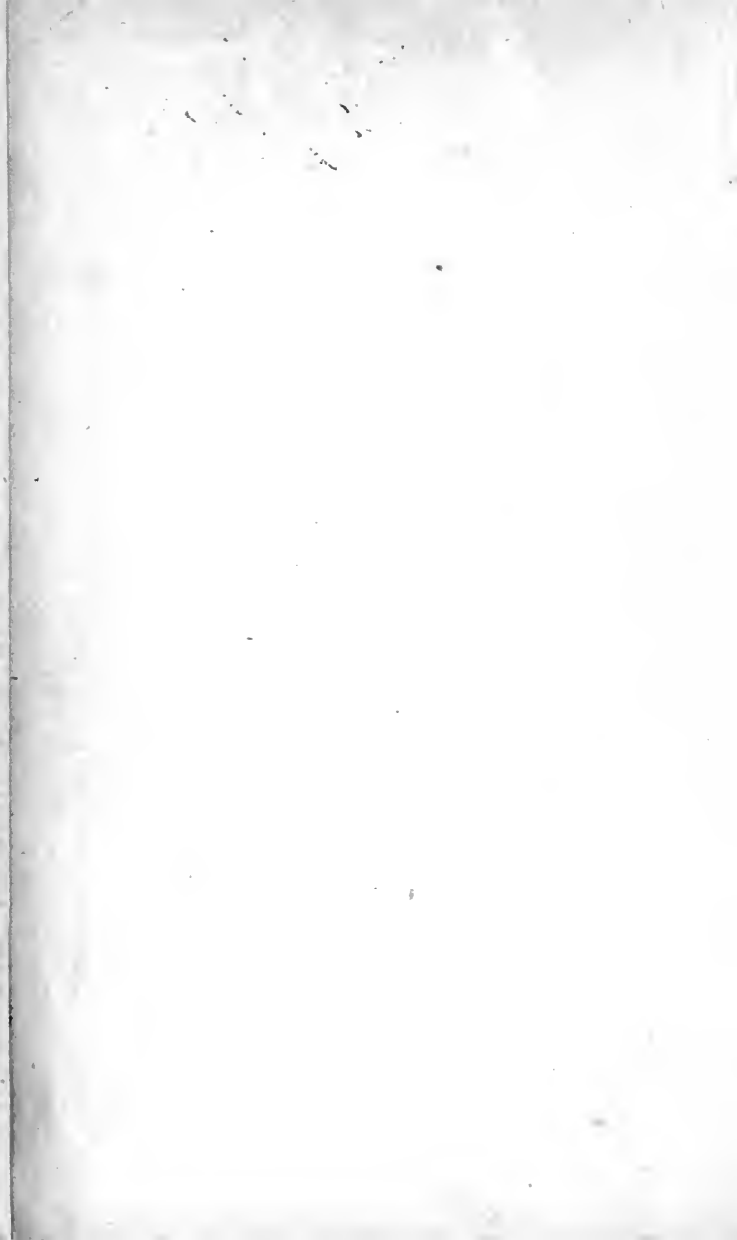


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July 1858
CLOVER COTTAGE;

OR,

I CAN'T GET IN.

A NOVELETTE.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "THE FALCON FAMILY,"

"MY UNCLE THE CURATE."

ETC. ETC.

"Read it at your idle times, and the follies your good judgment will find
in it, blame not but laugh at."—SIR PHILIP SYDNEY.

LONDON:

CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.

1856.

LONDON:
BRADBURY AND EVANS, PRINTERS, WHITEFRIARS.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

MEN.

MR. SOLOMON WINDFALL, *Bachelor, entitled to Clover, but not in possession of it.*

JACK ROBINSON, *his Friend, a good fellow who loves a good Dinner.*

MR. BLUNT, *the Honest Attorney.*

MR. WITHERING, *Clerk to Mr. Blunt.*

FLORIO, *a Poet, Laureate of the Village.*

POWDERHAM, BAGSHOT, AIMWELL, and COLONEL O'TRIGGER, *Members of the Old Crony Club, and Friends of Mr. Windfall.*

CAPTAIN DOVE and LIEUTENANT SHUNFIELD, *Crimean Heroes, and Brother and Cousin of Mrs. Wily.*

WOMEN.

MRS. WILY, *Widow, in possession of Clover, but not entitled to it.*

FIDELIA, *her Friend and Confidante.*

MOPSA, *her Maid.*

DOROTHY, *Servant to Mr. Windfall.*

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CLOVER COTTAGE.

CHAPTER I.

MR. WINDFALL RELATES HIS TROUBLES TO HIS
FRIEND MR. ROBINSON.

“VERY pretty—very comfortable—all that—as pretty and snug a thing of the kind as there is in all England,—I only wish I was in it, Mr. Robinson:—but there’s the rub—I can’t get in,—can’t get in, do you see?”

“Can’t get in! can’t get into your own house, pooh, nonsense,—there are legal forms of course.—Oh, Solomon Windfall, you are a lucky dog, to have such a nice thing as that to settle down in for the remainder of your days. You will be as snug as a superannuated bishop. I’m told it’s a jewel of a cottage, embosomed in wood abounding

with game; on the banks of a stream swarming with trout and salmon; the cosiest parlour that ever eight or ten good fellows like you and me were ever jolly in—and the nicest kitchen that ever cooked a substantial old-fashioned English dinner. I tell you what it is, my good friend Windfall, you shall see a great deal of me in Clover Cottage.”

The first speaker, a comely, rosy-cheeked, elderly gentleman, with a prosperous person, inclined to rotundity, but a rather solicitous and rueful expression of countenance, possibly on account of the difficulty he seemed to be in about getting into possession of his property, or perhaps that he had some hereditary gout flying about him, replied to Mr. Robinson’s gratulatory speech with not a little peevishness, stamping the floor as he spoke with his gold-headed cane;—

“But, I tell you I can’t get in—I can’t get in myself.”

Mr. Robinson, (a bluff square-built gentleman, who seemed to know what the good things of

this life consist in and to have been tolerably successful in getting his share of them;) looked puzzled and bewildered, like a man posed with a conundrum, or undergoing a Civil Service examination. He could not understand how Mr. Windfall, or anybody else, could find any serious difficulty in getting into his own house;—his intellects were not equal to the effort of conceiving such a thing, particularly as he felt that if *he* were Mr. Windfall, and had such a cottage as that left him by a relative, it would be no easy matter to keep him out of the enjoyment of his good fortune for a single hour.

After looking, therefore, exceedingly perplexed for the space of a minute or so, he stared his friend fixedly in the face, and in a tone equally emphatic and inquisitive, pronounced the monosyllable—

“Why?”

“Why!” repeated Mr. Windfall, “simply because my late lamented godmother, Mrs. Silverspoon,”—here he sighed more deeply than was perhaps perfectly consistent with sincerity

—"was unfortunately prevailed on shortly before her decease, to lend the cottage to a clever little widow—the widow Wily—and the widow is in Clover to this hour,"—and down went the gold-headed stick again, like a paviour's rammer.

"Well," said Mr. Robinson, seemingly not much more enlightened by this explanation.

"Well," re-echoed the rubicund gentleman with the rueful physiognomy.

"Well!—I don't think it is well, Mr. Robinson."

Mr. Robinson now grew warm, and when men grow warm they sometimes speak more volubly than usual, sometimes the contrary, with short convulsive intervals between their words. Mr. Robinson's warmth betrayed itself in the latter way.

"Why—don't—you—take possession of your house?—answer me that, Solomon Windfall."

It was now Mr. Windfall's turn to show some choler, and his choler acting on his imagination suggested a practical mode of illustrating his embarrassment in a way that would probably





make it intelligible to his friend. He laid his cane aside, and taking hold of his friend's two hands, he flopped him down in a particularly well-stuffed elbow-chair which happened to be just behind him.

"There!" said Mr. Windfall, letting go the hands.

Robinson now began to think his friend was going out of his wits,—in fact, that his good fortune had turned the little brains Mr. Windfall had.

"There!" repeated Mr. Windfall, "the chair is the cottage, the jewel of a cottage, as you call it—you are the clever widow—I am myself, the proprietor."

"Well!"

"Don't you see?"

"See what, man?"

"You find that chair comfortable, don't you?—cosy—snug—the cosiest in the room—in the house?—eh?"

"Yes, very—I never sat in a more comfortable chair, never."

“ Very well, now—I want to get into it.”

“ But you shan’t—I’m in it before you.”

“ Ah ! there it is,” cried Solomon. “ You have it at last—I want to get in, and I can’t—you won’t let me, and we can’t both sit in the chair at once,—now do you see ? ”

Mr. Robinson did see : there was no need to say so—his face showed it ; he no longer looked like a man with a hard intellectual nut to crack, and not well off for intellectual nut-crackers. He continued to sit in the chair representing the cottage, an elbow resting on each cushioned arm, looking at his friend anxiously, thoughtfully, deliberatively, like a man hatching the golden egg of friendly advice and suggestion. Windfall sat down facing him ; there was about half a yard between their noses.

At length Mr. Robinson, collecting all the rays of his intelligence into one focus, and compressing into one sentence all the lore and experience of a life that had reached its forty-fifth summer, or thereabouts, delivered himself oracularly as follows :

“If the widow won’t go out of her own accord, you must make her.”

Mr. Solomon Windfall, after a moment’s pause, during which he looked more than usually sagacious, protested he thought this was “by no means bad advice.”

“What steps have you taken already?” inquired Robinson: “of course you have apprised the widow that you require early possession.”

“Yes, yes,—most distinctly—through Tom Cateran, my friend, and her brother-in-law—better than writing myself, you know—correspondence with a widow is a ticklish thing, a very ticklish thing.”

“I know Tom Cateran,” said Mr. Robinson, significantly.

“To be sure you do,” said Mr. Windfall.

“I dine with him this day week—probably you do too.”

“No, I don’t,—I never dined with Tom Cateran. Tom dines with me, but I never dine with Tom—curious, isn’t it?—you dine with everybody, friend Robinson.”

This was very true. Robinson had as good a knack of getting his legs under the mahogany of his friends and acquaintances as any man living.

“I’m more social than you, Solomon, but we’ll make a social fellow of you, when you get into possession of your cottage;—that’s the first consideration at present, and now let me ask you a question,—how long is it since Tom Cateran undertook to negotiate the surrender of Clover for you?”

“Let me see,” said Mr. Windfall,—“a month ago, a full month ago.”

“A full month—you take things very quietly, Solomon. You must bestir yourself, my good friend. Don’t rely upon Tom Cateran, or anybody else. What is it to Tom how long you are out of your house and property?—the widow is his relation too—remember that. But, putting sinister motives out of the question, Tom has other things to think of, and has probably never troubled his head about you or your cottage ever since you spoke to him on the subject.”

"Do you really think so?" said poor Mr. Windfall with anxiety.

"Remember what Poor Richard says," replied Mr. Robinson; "if you want to have your business done, go yourself; if *not*, send another."

"I'll be guided by you in future," said Mr. Windfall. "Your advice is sound, excellent; if the widow won't go out of her own accord, we must make her."

"We must, Solomon; if we don't, we shall not be in the cottage before partridge-shooting. You must go down to Clover yourself, and see the widow yourself, without an hour's delay."

"To that," said Mr. Windfall, with unusual promptitude and decision, and a most vigorous thump of the cane on the floor, "I have an insuperable objection."

Robinson could not help laughing at the determined manner in which this was said, and the antipathy his friend manifestly had to holding any kind of personal communication with the pretty widow who was keeping him out of his property.

“ Ah, you inveterate old bachelor ! ” cried Robinson, shaking him by the collar of his coat ; “ it would do you a great deal of good to hold more intercourse with pretty widows than you do.”

Mr. Windfall only answered with another thump of the cane, puffing his cheeks, and protruding his lips, as if the very notion of coming into personal collision with Mrs. Wily had quite dumfounded him.

“ Well, then,” said Robinson, “ since you won’t do the natural thing, and the obvious thing, which is to write yourself, or go yourself, I am at a loss what to advise you, and I must take until to-morrow to deliberate. I’ll see you to-morrow, and give you my opinion.”

Mr. Windfall was profuse of thanks to his friend for his active services in his cause ; but Mr. Robinson was frank with him, and told him roundly that he was as anxious about the business as he was, and quite as much interested in it. “ For, in fact, my good friend Solomon,” said he, “ this snug cottage of yours, with the fishing and

shooting, is just the thing I have been looking out for in vain for many a year—the very thing I wanted.”

“That *you* wanted!” exclaimed Mr. Windfall with some surprise.

“Not the cottage, of course, my dear fellow; the cottage is yours; but a friend like you possessing such a cottage—that is what I have long wanted; a place within easy reach of town, where one can run down on a Saturday evening, and stay till Monday morning; spend the Christmas holidays, the Easter recess, and probably a good deal of the long vacation; without form or ceremony. I look forward, Solomon, my dear friend, to a great many merry meetings in this cottage of yours; and you may therefore rely upon my leaving no stone unturned to help you to get into it as soon as possible.”

Solomon puffed his cheeks a good deal, and looked a little bewildered, as his warm and candid friend went through all the holidays in the year in his jovial speculation on the hospitalities of Clover; but there was nothing close

or niggardly about Solomon Windfall, nothing at all; he had no other feelings towards Robinson but gratitude for his services, and he parted from him with a very hearty shake of the hand and an equally hearty invitation to his cottage, as soon as he could get into it himself.

CHAPTER II.



THE COTTAGE IN DISPUTE.

SURRENDER Clover!

The moment you saw it, you perfectly understood why Mrs. Wily was in no hurry to surrender it. Despairing of painting it ourselves in colours bright enough to paint it truly, we shall pilfer a short account of this rural gem from the portfolio of the village poet, with whom the reader will in the sequel become personally acquainted. Florio did not often condescend to prose, and when he did, it was usually in the following somewhat rhapsodical and inflated manner.

“Imagine the rosiest, cosiest, sunniest, honey-ist, loveliest and doveliest, balmiest, and lamb-iest, neatest, sweetest, and completest cot, cottage,

nest, nook, den, hermitage, or whatever else there is at once snug and beautiful in all the world ;— imagine that, and you have Clover before your mind's eye as perfectly as if it was a picture by Gainsborough."

Or figure to yourself, if you prefer it, an extract made by Atkinson or Rowland from as many charming rural retreats as there are perfumes that go to the composition of "Milles-Fleurs." Clover was not so much cottage as otto, or concentrated essence of cottage. It was just the bonny thing that Mab would choose to tickle your fancy with, if she wanted to drive you cottage-mad. You know that form of insanity? The Sylvios and Pastorellas are very subject to it at tender ages, and the fit generally comes on when the "Young May Moon is beaming," so that there is no question of its being a form of lunacy, though one of the mildest.

Clover, you must know, had the most powerful natural orchestra that ever ravished the human ear. Blackbirds, thrushes, larks, linnets, finches,

and doves, in short all the Sweet Unpaid, sang, piped, warbled, and cooed the livelong day in the woods and meadows that encompassed it; and the moment night came, the nightingale—melodious *roué*—turned it into day again with his incessant nocturnal performances. Moreover, combining substantial comforts with airy delights, this fortunate spot could boast of the happiest family circlet of cows and calves, kids and rabbits, pigs and guinea-pigs, lambs, lambkins, and lambkinets, that ever bleated or grunted, frisked or capered, nibbled or browsed. Then its flower-garden, which hung on a southern slope, was a wilderness of sweets, and a blaze of colours; to what can I compare it but to a variegated robe suspended in the sun, or an eastern carpet on which my lady's maid has spilled a whole casket of odours? The kitchen-garden was the flower-garden repeated or prolonged, with the necessary substantial difference of containing all manner of delicious fruits and esculent roots and herbs, from the melting peach to the hot horse-radish, which grew, let me tell you, at

a prudent distance from the monkshood. The side of the dell opposite to the garden was not covered with green velvet, but with a smooth verdant turf that looked as like green velvet as possible; and finally, down in the bottom of this romantic hollow, ran sparkling and foaming, a stream abounding with trout of the finest flavour, while across it was flung a rustic bridge, uniting the two sides of the valley, and completing the loveliest picture in the loveliest shire of the loveliest country in Europe.

Surrender it, indeed!—and at the first summons too!

You would not have surrendered it yourself, fair and gentle reader, without a vast deal of the maturest consideration. You would have sat a long time—believe me, fair one—of a sweet summer evening, under its cosy porch, overgrown with roses and eglantine, thinking the matter privately over, or debating it with your privy-councillor, before you would have made up your mind to resign such a prize.

Aristides might do it, being so passionate a lover of justice in the abstract; but you, not being Aristides, nor having his immense reputation for probity to support, would have felt that you couldn't, wouldn't, nay shouldn't do it, inas-much as if you once, in a moment of weakness or precipitation, gave Clover up, your chance of ever again tenanting such a charming little model of Elysium would not be worth a song or a sixpence, by all the doctrine of human probabilities.

But whether you or I would, or would not, is not the question. We are not in possession—I only wish we were. The question is not put to us, but to the widow Wily: and there she is sitting at this very moment discussing either that or some other interesting matter with her friend Fidelia, under that very porch on a lovely evening in the prime of June; the roses gushing into bloom, and the birds singing in full chorus round about her. Fidelia has in her hand some idle book, Mrs. Wily holds in her taper fingers a needle bright and sharp as she is herself,

but the needle is unemployed and the book is unread.

Observe her, pray! She is a buxom, handsome, winsome little woman,—is she not?

That she is decidedly,—fat and fair, yet not too fat, and a good way yet from forty; comfortable, too, as Clover itself.

Did you ever see a widow's sad weeds worn so smartly? Did you ever see affliction less disconsolate, or sorrow look so gay?

Surely never, and Oh! what a love of a cap!

That which you call a cap is not a cap:—it is coquetry made of muslin.

But what a pair of eyes she has in her head!

Eyes call you them? say stars rather,—the planets Venus and Mercury,—for you observe she has an eye for fun and an eye for speculation.

The latter is the brighter of the two!

Perhaps so.

Poor Mr. Windfall! will he ever recover his beautiful cottage?

A serious question!—but the author is gossiping with the reader instead of inviting him to listen to what is going on between the widow and her friend. That, however, is of importance enough to claim a chapter to itself.

CHAPTER III.

FAIR FRIENDS IN COUNCIL.—THE POET JOINS
THEM.

VERY important, indeed—very important to Messieurs Windfall and Robinson is the discussion under the cottage porch. The widow is actually making her arrangements for the autumn, so little notion has she of relinquishing Clover until towards the fall of the leaf at the nearest ; nor indeed is she severely to be blamed, considering what milk-and-water measures Mr. Windfall has yet taken to dislodge her.

“ Do you know what I think, Simplicia dear ? ” said the fair maid to the buxom widow.

“ Tell me, Fidelia,” said the lady in gay weeds, with a remarkably mellow, soft, clear, joyous voice, in perfect harmony with her cosy person. —The widow sang divinely, by the bye, just as if

she had taken lessons from a nightingale, and bettered her instructions.

“I think Mr. Solomon Windfall must be either a very, very good-natured gentleman, or he must have very little taste for the country.”

Mrs. Wily looked up from the needle-work which she had just resumed, and nodded assent with a shrewd sparkle of her planetary eyes.

“Really, I believe he is a very worthy man,” she said, after a moment's pause. “I have not the pleasure of knowing him.”

“Evidently he is not impatient to take possession of his property,” resumed Fidelia.

“Well, my dear,” said the widow, smiling, “nor am I impatient to give it up to him.”

“Oh, dear!” exclaimed her friend; “I do hope we shall have you here another winter at least. You made the last so pleasant. I really do not know what we shall do in this dull neighbourhood when we lose our dear Mrs. Wily.”

“Ah, my dear girl,” said the widow with a pretty little sigh, “I can hardly look forward so far as that; but I should certainly be sorry to

be compelled to leave this before September. You know whom I expect in September, don't you ? ”

“ No, Simplicia ; who ? ”

“ My two Crimean heroes—no less.”

“ Your brother, Captain Dove ? ”

“ Yes ; and my cousin, Lieutenant Shunfield.”

“ I am enchanted ; it will make you so happy. How I do long to see a Crimean hero. You certainly must not leave this before September.”

“ I have no present *intention* of doing so,” said the widow. “ On the contrary, I have written to my brother to say I have every hope of being here on his return, and to desire him to bring my cousin here with him for the partridge-shooting, which I am told is very good about Clover.”

“ They will get leave of absence, of course ? ”

“ Oh, of course ; urgent private affairs, my dear.”

“ Which means partridge-shooting, of course,” said Fidelia, laughing.

“How much better, my love, than shooting the poor Russians; though, indeed, to do my heroes justice,” added the widow, her eyes twinkling with humour, “I believe they have shot very few birds of that feather. I’ll answer for my gallant cousin at all events.”

“Perhaps the Russians wouldn’t come and be shot, my dear.”

“Well, I hope the partridges will be more obliging.”

“Oh, Simplicia, I look forward to such an autumn; you here, and your brother and cousin returned from the wars; there will be no end to the dinners and fêtes in the neighbourhood. I am almost selfish enough to wish Mr. Windfall a good long steady fit of the gout to keep him perfectly quiet—at least till October.”

“You wicked creature,” said the widow, with reproving looks and a sweet severity of tone. “But here comes Florio, our village laureate, one of my greatest favourites. We must try and keep him to supper.”

“And a great favourite of mine, too,” said

Fidelia ; “ but there will be no difficulty in keeping him to supper. You see he has got a paper in his hand ; another song, I hope. I do think him such a very nice poet.”

Meanwhile Florio was advancing towards them, with all the air of a privileged person, and one who well understood the importance belonging to the bardic character, among the pensive maidens, merry wives, and consolable widows of his rural circle. He was a gentle youth, of a roseate complexion, a bright rolling eye, curly brown ringlets dropping from beneath his pastoral *chapeau de paille*, and a dewy mouth at once pleasant and capacious, formed alike to let good things out in the shape of rustic quips and quiddities, and take good things in, such as gooseberry-champagne, syllabubs, custards, cherry-bounce, or better than all, for 'twas what he most loved, strawberries and clouted cream. Florio in short, was something between a sylvan Apicius and a village Tennyson ; but if his songs were “ lean and flashy,” and did usually

“ Grate on his scrannel pipe of wretched straw,”

they had the merit of being suited to the ears and tastes of his audiences, and made him a welcome guest at every table, mahogany or maple, for twenty miles round about. His Muse was always at his elbow, a great point for a practical, every-day working poet as he was. No village nuptials, however rapid might be the transition from Cupid to Hymen, ever found him unready with his epithalamium. The most unexpected parturition never caught Florio without his lyrical compliments to "the little stranger," the "firstling of the flock," or the "last new publication," in the advanced state called "cut and dry." At Christmas he had always his carol, at Easter his hymn, at sheep-shearing his eclogue, and at Harvest Home his "irregular," *very* irregular, ode to Pan. But although of Sheep he had sung as much as any piping swain of his day, and perhaps eaten as much mutton, he never contracted the simplicity or silliness of that animal; but on the contrary his insight into character was shrewd, and he knew as well how to turn his penetration to good

account as if he had been educated in clubs or courts.

Such was Florio Meadows, who now with a profusion of rustic bows and compliments, presented himself before the fair widow and her confidante, predetermined to partake their comfortable supper, but prepared to entertain his entertainers with the melody he held in his hand.

The widow began by schooling him; called him truant, and asked him where he had been straying. Had he been living on filberts in the woods, or fallen asleep in a grotto, or what had he been about, that for three whole days he had not been seen at Clover?

Florio replied, he had been only working very steadily at his trade.

“Do you call poetry a trade?” said Fidelia, upbraidingly.

“A poet is a song-wright, is he not?” answered Florio; “but the poet is a man of many trades,—he is a weaver of verses, a builder of rhymes, a coiner of words, a scene-painter, a toy-maker, a sculptor because he makes images, a tailor

because he is a man of measures, a carpenter because he hammers his own wooden pate,—a poet is everything almost but a baker, for, alas ! he seldom or never makes his bread by his verses.”

“ Ah, but if our Florio’s pate is a wooden one,” said the widow, “ it is a very precious wood, as I dare say the verses in his hand this moment are quite enough to prove.”

“ He seldom comes empty-handed, to do him justice,” said Fidelia.

“ A hand full of empty things may well be said to be empty,” said the bard ; “ but whether my poor lines be sage or silly, rough or smooth, sweet or scentless, you shall have them :—in sooth, I came expressly to lay them at Mrs. Wily’s feet, suggested or inspired, as they were, by her fond attachment to this romantic abode and her keen appreciation of all the charms of Nature.”

After this eloquent speech, which was no doubt a studied impromptu, the bard of the village repeated in a sort of recitative the following copy of verses :

I.

And dost thou ask me why
I love to linger here?
Here's Beauty for the eye,
And Music for the ear.

II.

Here Nature bids me stay
With all her birds and bells.
Why should I flee away
To less enchanting dells?

III.

Once, when I wished to rove,
Soft music bad me not,
The cooing of a dove
From yonder cosy cot.

IV.

I decked my temple fair
With wreath of rosy spray ;
It rustled in my hair
The same domestic lay.

V.

The wild brook huddling past
His hard lot doth bewail,
Compelled to flee so fast
From this delicious vale.

VI.

I've spent my happiest hours
Beneath those dear old trees ;
Let those seek other bowers
Who are not blest in these.

VII.

Then dost thou ask me why
I love to linger here?
Here's Beauty for the eye,
And Music for the ear.

This latest triumph of Florio's pastoral reed was received with boundless applause by his audience, "fit though few;" the widow and maiden promptly paid him with their most radiant smiles, —Mrs. Wily stuck a rose in his button-hole, Fidelia decked his hat with a sprig of jessamine, and a little later, when the shadows grew very long and almost every bird but the nightingale was mute, they improved his remuneration substantially with a meal, which was spread by the pretty Mopsa, and combined a tea and a supper in the most comfortable cottage style.

CHAPTER IV.



MR. WINDFALL IS ADVISED TO EMPLOY AN ATTORNEY.

“WELL, Robinson, what do you advise?—what am I to do?—I ought to do something. Have you formed a plan of operations?”

“Well, I have,” said Mr. Robinson. “Since, incurable old bachelor, that you are, you are afraid to face the widow in person, Solomon, you must face her by proxy,—you must only employ an attorney.”

“An attorney, Robinson, must there be an attorney?”

“To be sure there must.”

“Why, then, Robinson, I may just as well do the thing handsomely, renounce my dear god-mother’s bequest, and give the cottage up altogether. Attorneys bring lawyers—lawyers

bring actions—actions bring costs. I see the bill before me, as long as my arm.—The Cottage must be sold to pay them. Robinson, my dear Robinson, if an attorney is necessary, I am afraid my poor godmother's affectionate intentions towards me will never be fulfilled."

"They shall," said Robinson, "I am resolved they shall; remember I told you I am as much interested in this business as you are yourself. I am in as great a hurry to be in Clover as you are—so, now listen—I know a thing you don't know—a thing you never heard of—never dreamed of—never would dream of, if you lived for a thousand years, Solomon Windfall. I know an honest attorney!"

"An honest attorney!—you are joking."

"No, I am serious."

"Then, Robinson, you know something nobler than the noblest work of God. What's his name?"

"Blunt."

"But let Blunt be ever so honest, he must have his costs."

“ Blunt never acts for any one who has not an honest case—such a case as yours. Then he always makes the wrongdoer pay the costs ;—if he can’t get them, why he does without them. He is an extraordinary man, my friend Blunt.”

“ Very,—I never heard of such a man before.”

“ Do you promise me to leave the case in his hands, and trust me ; *we*—observe, Solomon, I say *we*—will be in possession of Clover before—at all events before the First of September, ready for the partridge shooting, old fellow ; and you shall ask Powderham, Bagshot, and O’Trigger, and all our old school-fellows, cronies, and cater-cousins ; we’ll be the jolliest shooting party in all the stubbles of England.”

“ Good-bye, Robinson. Try to find out what Tom Cateran has been doing for me, if he has been doing anything.”

“ Yes, yes, good-bye, Solomon.”

CHAPTER V.

MR. WINDFALL CALLS UPON THE HONEST
ATTORNEY.

THERE are some few men in the world upon whose foreheads Nature has written honesty in a hand as plain and legible as she wrote the word "Gentleman" on Uncle Toby's. Mr. Blunt was one of the number. I need hardly add that he was an eccentric member of his profession, for *that* you know already from the extraordinary character Mr. Robinson gave of him in the last chapter. In fact he was generally looked on by his professional brethren as not only an odd fish but a black sheep ; however, as everybody knows, the sheep that are considered black by a flock of that colour are the very whitest sheep of all.

"Happy to see you, sir," said Mr. Blunt, "always glad to see a friend of Mr. Robinson's.

He tells me in his letter now before me, that you have got your grievance like other people ; pray let us hear—what is it ? ”

“ I have a beautiful cottage in Hampshire ”—

“ I wish *I* had such a grievance,” cried Mr. Blunt ; “ but proceed, Mr. Windfall.”

“ As snug a cottage as ever you saw ; rosy and cosy ; garden, orchard, shrubbery ; shooting and fishing—everything any reasonable man could wish.”

“ And you are not content, Mr. Solomon ? ”

“ Windfall, if you please.”

“ Mr. Windfall—I beg your pardon—but pray, Mr. Windfall, come to the point : what *is* your grievance ? ”

“ I can’t get into my cottage.”

“ The roads are in such bad order ? ”

“ Roads, no, no,—worse than that.”

“ The bridge across the river swept away by the floods ? ”

“ No, no.”

“ An over-holding tenant, then.”

“ Not exactly a tenant.—only an occupier.”

"Somebody who is in possession of this paradise of yours, and whom you want to turn out,—that's it, I dare say?"

"Yes, Mr. Blunt; but somebody who has no right to be in it."

Mr. Blunt laughed.

"I see how it is," he said, "this is a case of 'Paradise Lost,' and you want my assistance to make it 'Paradise Regained.'"

"Exactly so, Mr. Blunt, exactly so; but remember the party in possession has no right, no right to it in the world."

"Never mind that," said the attorney,—“never mind the right, at present—there is somebody in possession of your property?"

Mr. Windfall assented, with a sigh,—it was there, critically, the shoe pinched.

"Well, then, sir," said Mr. Blunt, looking as grave as the gravest judge on the bench, "I'm sorry to say, Mr. Windfall, yours is rather an ugly case."

"An ugly case!" cried poor Solomon, in the greatest surprise and dismay.

“ Very ugly ; and now I’ll tell you why. In every question of law, you must know, there are ten points.”

“ Ten points !—so many !—I had no idea,” said Mr. Windfall.

“ Yes, Mr. Solomon ; I mean, Mr. Windfall.—How is it that in speaking to you I always think of the Solomon first ? Yes, there are ten points, and nine of them are right against you.”

“ Why indeed,” said poor Solomon, looking very chap-fallen, “ I do remember to have heard it said (though I always thought it a joke) that possession is nine points of law.”

“ You have only one point on your side, and that a very poor one—there is absolutely nothing in your favour but your bare ownership.”

“ But ownership, Mr. Blunt !—Surely when a thing is a man’s own ”—

“ Ah, Mr. Windfall, if every man had his own in this world ! ”

“ But, sir,” cried Mr. Windfall, rapidly warming, while the solicitor, of course, remained cool

as a cucumber,—“ in this country, sir,—in this free country, this glorious country, every man's house is his castle ; and though mine is only a cottage, Mr. Blunt,”—

“ You are on the wrong side of it, Mr. Windfall,—the outside,—don't ruffle yourself,—no use in that. Who is the usurper.”

“ The Widow Wily, sir.”

“ Defendant a widow !—uglier and uglier.”

“ On the contrary,” said our Solomon, briskly, “ they say she is very handsome.”

“ Ugly in law, I meant, Mr. Windfall ; let a widow be ever so handsome in fact, she is ugly in law,—what we call in professional parlance, an ugly customer.”

“ But surely, Mr. Blunt.”—

“ Something ought to be done for you—that's what you were going to say—yes, and something shall be done for you, were it only to oblige my old friend, Robinson.”

“ Thank you, Mr. Blunt, thank you very much, Mr. Blunt.”

“ What does the widow say for herself?—Of

course you have written to her, and have got her answer in your pocket?"

"No,—I refrained from writing to her in person—I was apprehensive"—

"What!—not written!—not so much as demanded possession!—not so much as a polite note to say you wanted to get into your house! And you come to a solicitor—you come to me—to help you. I won't. I'll have nothing to do with your case—at least at present. Go home, Mr. Solomon,—write the widow a friendly but firm letter,—grass before stones, of course—ask her civilly to surrender the possession, and if she refuses, then it will be time enough to come back to me."

"But, Mr. Blunt"—

"I won't hear another word,—be your own attorney, sir;—I fear you are a most litigious old gentleman. Go home, sir, and write your letter, firm and resolute, but as civil and polite as you choose."

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH MR. WINDFALL THROWS GRASS BEFORE
STONES.

THAT same evening Mr. Windfall wrote the rough draft of his letter ; the following morning revised, corrected, and polished it up ; and then, having written it out fair on a sheet of the finest gilt letter-paper, and also made a copy of the corrected composition, he folded and directed his epistle, sealed it with the Windfall crest, and finally took it to the post-office himself, and with his own hands dropped it into the lion's mouth, so as to make as sure as possible of the safe delivery of a document which had cost him so much pains, and upon which so much depended.

Mr. Robinson, going in full fig to dine with Mrs. Wily's relations, the Caterans, met Mr. Windfall returning after posting his letter, to

dine on a melancholy mutton chop in the solitude of his bachelor's chambers.

Robinson was scrupulously punctual in his convivial engagements, no doubt finding it politic to be so, but he had a few moments now to spare, and he was anxious to hear what advice Mr. Blunt had given.

"Your honest attorney is a very odd sort of man," said Mr. Windfall.

"What did he say to you?"

"He called me a litigious old fellow, and almost turned me out of his office, only because I was too cautious to write to the widow myself in the first instance."

"Then I suppose you are now to write: that's the course, eh?"

"Yes, Robinson, and I *have* written; I am just come from posting my letter."

"Right, all right. A strong letter, I hope."

"Firm and decided," said Solomon; but civil and polite, very polite. Mr. Blunt dwelt upon that; 'grass before stones,' those were his very words."

“All right; only follow Mr. Blunt's directions, and all will go well, depend upon it. I am on my way to dine with Tom CATERAN. I wish you were coming with me. Good bye, Solomon. I'll find out whether Tom has been doing anything for you.”

“Do now, Robinson, like a good fellow.”

Mr. Robinson bustled away, but had hardly turned the corner of the street when Mr. Blunt met him, going home from his office after the day's labour.

“I have seen your ill-used friend,” said the attorney.

“So he told me: he has written the letter you advised.”

“I hope he has written a peremptory one.”

“Peremptory, but polite, he tells me, according to your instructions.”

“No harm in being civil. Why doesn't he marry the widow? That would be the best way of settling the matter?”

“Ha, ha, ha! Solomon Windfall is an inveterate old bachelor; he'll never marry.”

“Pooh, nonsense; make him marry the widow. Good bye, Mr. Robinson; you are in a hurry to your dinner.”

As we are not going with Mr. Robinson to dine with Mr. Cateran any more than our friend Mr. Solomon Windfall, we cannot occupy the remainder of this brief chapter better than by producing the “firm but polite” despatch written by the latter gentleman, and which is already on its way to the cottage in Hampshire, to fall like a thunderbolt on the head of the innocent and unsuspecting widow Wily.

“10, BLOOMSBURY BUILDINGS,
June 10th, 1855.

“DEAR MADAM,

“Knowing the affectionate intimacy that subsisted between you and my late respected and lamented godmother, Mrs. Silverspoon, I am the more reluctant to trouble you on the subject of the cottage which she lent you some time before her demise, and in which you at present reside; but you are aware, I presume, dear Madam, of the strong claims I have to it, under the last will

and testament of the excellent lady I have just alluded to, and whose irreparable loss in common we deplore. I must be permitted to hope you have found it comfortable in all respects during your residence in it, and that the air of Clover has agreed with the health of you and your interesting young family. It only remains for me now to state, which I do under legal advice, that I shall feel deeply obliged by your letting me know when it will be your perfect convenience to surrender possession; and sincerely hoping that you will have no difficulty in finding in a week or two a residence equally commodious and to your taste in all respects,

“ I have the great honour to be,

“ Dear Madam,

“ Your respectful and obliged servant,

“ SOLOMON WINDFALL.”

CHAPTER VII.

MR. WINDFALL SPENDS A BUSY DAY.

THE next day—the day after the dinner at Mr. CATERAN'S, where Mr. ROBINSON was, and Mr. WINDFALL was not,—Mr. ROBINSON called at Bloomsbury Buildings at a very early hour for a convivial gentleman as he was, namely, 10 o'clock in the forenoon. Mr. WINDFALL was out, which was equally unusual with him; not because his convivial habits prevented his early rising, but because, with his snug three hundred a-year, he followed no profession; in fact, had nothing to do but think of his grievances, of which he had now enough on his hands.

Mr. WINDFALL'S servant had no notion where her master was, but she thought he was gone to his tailor's about his shooting-dress, and would probably not be long out.

“ A shooting-dress ! ” repeated Robinson, smiling ; “ Well, that looks as if he was determined to get into his cottage at all events,” and away he went, looking disappointed, but promising to call again.

He did call again at one o'clock, but only to hear that his friend had returned in the interval, and had gone out a second time, about a new hat he had bought, and the leaf of which he did not approve of.

“ Too wide, I suppose,” said Robinson.

“ No, sir,” said the maid ; “ my master did not think it half wide enough ; he called it a wide-awake, I think.”

“ A wide-awake ! ” exclaimed Robinson, greatly amused ; “ I fancy I see your master in a wide-awake.”

“ Well, sir,” said Dorothy, “ master does look funny.”

“ Do you know, has he received a letter from the country—from Hampshire ? ”

“ No, sir, but I know he is expecting one ; I believe, sir, we are going to live at his estate in

the country in a few days;—my master has packed two portmanteaus, and ordered me to pack up the books, plate, and linen, and all my own things.”

“All right—tell him I called twice, and was sorry not to find him at home, as I had something very important to say to him.”

“Will you call to-morrow, Mr. Robinson?”

“Well, I probably will, Dorothy;—good-bye.”

At a still later period of the day Mr. Robinson called at Mr. Windfall's club (The Old Crony), to inquire for him, but with equal ill-success. It greatly puzzled him to think what he could be about, for Solomon, having but few haunts, was in general the easiest person in the world to find when you wanted him.

That day, however, was an exception. Never had Mr. Solomon Windfall passed such a busy day in his life. Before breakfast he packed one of the portmanteaus alluded to by his maid. He made a very hasty breakfast, scarcely glanced at his “Times,” and went off to his tailor's, to hasten the building of his sportsman's suit.

The coat was to have an unprecedented number of pockets, and there were to be partridges and wild ducks alternately on the buttons. He then returned to his lodgings, to see if the widow's letter had come with the expected surrender of the cottage. There was no letter, of course—it was quite too soon to expect one—but he found a band-box on his table with his wide-awake in it. The brim was hardly a foot broad, which vexed him; he wanted a particularly broad one, having some vague notion that any other would be highly improper when he came to be a cottager and country gentleman. So away he trotted again, like Mother Hubbard, to the hatters;—after that he did twenty other things, all with direct reference to the near approaching change in his life and habits: he subscribed to the “Sporting Magazine” and the “Gardener's Chronicle;” he bought several books on dogs, angling, agriculture, and other rural subjects; then he got himself a brandy bottle in a wicker case, a game-bag, a fishing-rod, and a double-barrelled gun; affording so much amusement to the people

of every shop where these several articles were sold, that they ought in justice to have let him have them at half price at the very most. When he thought he had purchased everything requisite to the complete sportsman, the Master of Clover turned his mind to farming, and spent an hour at the ware-rooms of Messrs. Raikes and Barrows, describing his prospects to them, asking their advice on various points, and examining and criticising spades, hoes, reaping-hooks, threshing-machines, watering-machines, churns, and things of that sort; but he actually bought nothing but an implement between a hoe and a walking-stick, to saunter about his place with, rooting up any chick-weed or dandelion, which his gardener might overlook in his labours.

From Messrs. Raikes and Barrows he went to his club; dined precipitately upon cold roast beef and half-a-pint of sherry; desired his friends, Toby Bagshot and old Jonathan Powderham, whom he met there, to keep themselves disengaged to shoot partridges with him in September; paid his little bill, scarcely waited

for some change due to him, and away again to the very last place in the world where (at least in ordinary times), any friend of his would think of looking for him—an establishment at Vauxhall for adult gentlemen, whose sportsmanlike education had been neglected in their youth, and where the “*old* idea” was literally taught “to shoot,” at the expense of flocks of pigeons kept expressly for their use and practice.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW MR. WINDFALL'S LETTER WAS RECEIVED
AT CLOVER.

"I FULLY expected it," said Fidelia: "how I *do* wish he had a *good* fit of the gout."

"Well then, my dear," said the widow, "what do you think of the letter now it has come?"

We need hardly say it was Mr. Windfall's letter they were talking of. Indeed it was lying on Mrs. Wily's lap,—she had just read it to her friend.

"A pretty broad hint, Simplicia, love, that he wants possession of his cottage."

All the craft of her crafty sex, all the expertness of expertest widowhood, combined with the individual native shrewdness and dexterity of the pretty, clever, coquettish, managing, and manœuvring little woman herself, were concen-

trated in Mrs. Wily's looks, as she very gravely rejoined to her friend's very natural reply :

"Now, Fidelia, *do you really think so?*"

Fidelia, who not only did really think so, but never dreamed that any human being could think otherwise, was taken aback by the new view of the matter implied in the widow's utterly unexpected question.

"Well, really," said the fluttered Fidelia, "I don't know, I'm sure,—perhaps I'm wrong, Simplicia, and I'm sure I most sincerely hope I am. But what do you think *yourself?*"

"Why then," said the widow, or rather the incarnation of feminine subtlety in the widow's agreeable form, "I do think, Fidelia,—I do, indeed, my dear—that I never in my life received a kinder, a more gentlemanlike, or more delicate communication."

"Well, it *is* gentlemanlike and delicate," said Fidelia, just beginning to see things in a glimmering way with the help of her friend's shrewder and brighter eyes.

"So very considerate," continued Mrs. Wily.

Fidelia admitted that too.

“He certainly says your *perfect convenience*,” said Fidelia: “but then——”

“But what, my dear?”

“Nothing,” said Fidelia; “I was only thinking of the last passage in the letter; it might, perhaps, be understood to imply that the plaguy old gentleman was impatient to get you out and to get in himself.”

“Now really, Fidelia,” said the widow, a little rebukingly, “that is really torturing Mr. Windfall’s words a little; besides, allow me to tell you, I do not like to hear him called a plaguy old gentleman.”

The notion of torturing even words was shocking to so good-natured a girl as Fidelia. She thought it would be very wrong to treat anybody’s words so barbarously, and made a playful apology for the way in which she had spoken of the worthy proprietor of Clover. She looked, however, a little inquisitive all the time, as if she had some wish to know how her friend understood the words in question; as

they could not by any means be interpreted into a notice to quit without violently straining their meaning.

“It is perfectly plain to me,” said Mrs. Wily, after a moment’s pause to explain herself the more fully, “that the letter would never have been written at all, only by the advice of some meddling lawyer or another. I am disposed therefore to look on it as nothing but a matter of form, and I am positive, dear Mr. Windfall intended I should look on it in that light. Observe, he tells me expressly he is acting under legal advice; and when I couple that with ‘my perfect convenience,’ and the general kind, extremely kind tone and language of the letter, I do feel, Fidelia dear, I should really be doing a worthy, excellent gentleman a very great injustice if I were to put cold, calculating, harsh constructions upon any portion of so friendly and handsome a communication. A little reflection, my dear, will, I am sure, convince you I am right.”

Fidelia was all the more easily convinced, as

she wished to be so, and her looks and nods expressed pretty plainly how much she was struck with her friend's ingenious views.

"I only wonder," said the dear Fidelia, "I could ever have seen it for a moment in any other light: but I am such a dull creature, and you, Simplicia love, are so clever, so very clever."

"Indeed Fidelia, I am no such thing," said Mrs. Wily, gently but firmly repudiating the compliment to her shrewdness. "This is not a case I think requiring cleverness, even if I had it. I hope, however, my heart is better than my head; the heart, Fidelia, believe me, is one's best counsellor; I think it right to consult its dictates on little occasions like this as well as great ones. By the bye it is a shame not to have noticed it before, but how very touching Mr. Windfall's allusion to his godmother is!—She was my very dear kind friend you know."

"I do think, Simplicia," cried Fidelia, with enthusiasm, jumping and kissing the widow's forehead, "you are all, all heart: and it is such a

relief to me to think that there is no danger yet of losing you. That letter did alarm me, I confess—just now, too, when the roses are blowing and the strawberries coming in, to say nothing of the Crimean heroes coming home, and all the gaieties we are sure to have in September.”

After Fidelia had kissed Simplicia, Simplicia kissed Fidelia: and this interkissing over, the widow remarked how particularly sweetly the birds were singing at the moment. So they were, indeed, as they always do at sunset: probably they have dined then, and their warbling is their grace after their seeds and worms.

Fidelia tossed back her little summer bonnet, which in truth hardly required it, as it scarcely touched her ears, and listened for an instant with the profoundest attention.

“You will call me,” she said, “a foolish fanciful girl, Simplicia, but do you know I can’t help conceiving that the linnets on the laurel hedge yonder are actually singing that sweet air—one of Moore’s Melodies, isn’t it? ‘Fly not yet,’—do listen, don’t you think so? and how appro-

priate it is to what we have been talking about!"

"Well, you are a fanciful creature, Fidelia," said the widow, rising and caressing her friend with a flower she had in her hand, "but really now there *is* some resemblance, and certainly it is a curious coincidence—'Fly not yet;'—we won't fly yet, pretty birds, we'll do what you bid us!"

"Now *you* shall sing it for me," said Fidelia.

"You won't care for my singing after the linnets." The melodious widow then complied with her friend's request, and sang two or three stanzas so sweetly, that the little Irish bard himself would have been enchanted, had he heard her.

"Now let us go in," she said, stopping abruptly; "I have my answer to write, and you will perhaps kindly see that the hamper for my sister Cateran is packed as usual, with the trout, chickens, vegetables and other things: to go to town by the morning-train."

"Yes, my dear,—did it occur to you to send

any little thing up to Mr. Windfall?—It's very good of me to think of him, for I don't like him half as well as you do;—he keeps me in a perpetual fright: I'm always expecting to see his old face appearing over the gate or the hedge."

"It really did not occur to me," said Mrs. Wily, "but I thank you, Fidelia, for suggesting it,—I'll think of it while I'm writing my letter."

CHAPTER IX.

THE WIDOW GIVES MR. WINDFALL A FIT OF
THE GOUT.

MR. WINDFALL was sitting in his chamber, very anxious, nervous, and impatient; expecting three things,—the answer from Clover—a visit from his friend Robinson—and the tailor with his shooting-coat. A fresh embarrassment had arisen about his coat, owing to the difficulty of getting buttons of the wild-duck pattern to mix with the partridges,—there seemed no end to Mr. Windfall's troubles. All his purchases of the previous day were scattered about the room, the floor of which was strewn with boxes, hampers and portmanteaus; all packed and corded, ready to be sent down into the country. He had his "wide-awake" on his head, (a huge sombrero it was,) and he was alternately taking up the

Gardener's Chronicle and Sportsman's Magazine, without reading very much of either.

No letter—no tailor—no Robinson.

Poor Solomon grew more and more fidgety every moment, and at last commenced pacing up and down his chamber, with his new hoe in his hand, feigning to try it on the daisies, cowslips, or whatever they were with which the carpet was figured, and ever and anon drawing himself up opposite the glass to see how his comical slouched hat became him. At last there came a double knock, too free for the tailor, and without the peculiarity of the postman's,—in fact it was Mr. Robinson; and that gentleman entered the next moment, looking as if he had something of consequence to communicate, and yet as if it had a ludicrous side to it, which it was impossible to prevent the mind's eye from dwelling on. Mr. Windfall could not help noticing this facetious expression in his friend's physiognomy, and he was not long without calling on him to explain what it was that diverted or tickled him.

The question seemed at once to compose Mr.

Robinson, who apologised for his gaiety, adding that it was no laughing matter at all, but quite the contrary.

“No laughing matter,” said Solomon, naturally enough, “yet it makes *you* laugh; perhaps it would make *me* laugh, too.”

The worthy gentleman did not often express himself with so much vivacity or antithesis.

“No, my dear Solomon,” replied his friend, shaking his head and looking doubly grave, “it would not make *you* laugh, decidedly.”

“Why so?” demanded poor Mr. Windfall.

“Because it is not only a *serious* matter, Solomon, but a serious matter affecting *you* seriously.”

“Affecting me!” exclaimed Solomon, briskly, “no bad news, I hope, about the cottage?”

“You shall hear,” said Robinson, looking about for a seat, and eventually seating himself on a port-manteau. “By the bye, Solomon, you will never see the birds with so broad a brim to your hat.”

“Never mind the hat,” said Mr. Windfall; “I want to hear your story.”

“You will hear it time enough, my dear fellow.”

“Pray, go on now.”

“I dined the day before yesterday with our common friend, or perhaps I should say our common acquaintance, Tom Cateran.”

“Yes, yes, I know that.”

“I never eat a better plain dinner in all my life.”

“A good dinner is a good thing,” said Solomon, “and there is no better judge of one than you are ; but come to the point.”

“Everything was good, nay excellent, but three or four things were perfect ;—you must not be impatient or I can't tell my story ;—three things were perfect—the fish, the finest trout I ever tasted—the rabbits and young ducks, the tenderest and plumpest I ever saw on a table—and the peas and potatoes, the greenest, the youngest, the most delicious that ever were served up to the Lord Mayor himself.”

“Well, Robinson, well, well, well.”

“By no means *well* for you, my dear friend Windfall, be calm now while I finish what I have to say.”

“Calm, why should I not? Go on, Robinson.”

“Where now do you think all these good things came from?”

“I have no idea,—how can I tell?”

“Every single one of them, Solomon, from Clover Cottage, presents from the widow in possession to your trusty friend Tom Cateran, or rather to his wife, her first cousin. Now you see how wisely you relied upon him in this business, and now you know why he did not ask you to dinner.”

Solomon could only express his horror and vexation by a groan, or rather a series of groans.

“Clover Cottage ducks,” resumed Robinson, “Clover Cottage peas and potatoes, and Clover Cottage rabbits smothered with Clover Cottage onions!”

A deep groan from poor Mr. Windfall followed each clause in this painfully accurate bill of particulars. It might have been inferred from the extreme depth of the last groan of the three that the rabbits smothered in onions affected the injured gentleman most; and in point of fact it

was so, for if there was one dish more than another which Mr. Windfall loved it was the dish in question, and the prospect of eating his own rabbits smothered in his own onions had long been one of his most agreeable day-dreams connected with his godmother's bequest.

Probably Mr. Robinson was not aware of this, or he would have smothered both rabbits and onions, and avoided wounding his friend so grievously. However, "*fidelia vulnere amici*." It was necessary thoroughly to awaken Mr. Windfall to a sense of his situation, and Mr. Robinson only did his duty in letting him know to what a monstrous extent his simplicity was practised on by Mrs. Wily and her relations.

Mr. Windfall, however, was unfortunately of a gouty constitution: and before his friend had concluded his astounding disclosures, he felt by most unmistakeable twinges in one of the toes of his right foot that he was in imminent danger of a pretty sharp fit of that painful but gentleman-like distemper.

Almost before he spoke came the sharp tap-tap

of the letter-carrier. Mrs. Wily's answer! Mr. Windfall forgot both the rabbits and the twinge of his toe in the eagerness with which he tore open a letter which would of course put an end to all his difficulties. He was not prepared (as the reader is) to read the following response from Mrs. Wily, acting under no legal adviser, having no professional assistance, but simply inspired by her natural shrewdness, and the proverbial subtlety and daring of her sex and condition.

"CLOVER COTTAGE,
16th June.

"MY DEAR MR. WINDFALL,

"Truly, most truly, grateful I am for the kind, more than kind, feeling which breathes through every line of your letter of the 10th instant, written, as you are so good as to acquaint me, under the direction of your lawyers, and which I therefore presume to have been a *necessary step* in support of the claims you allude to, under the will of the late truly excellent Mrs. Silverspoon. I can of course form no opinion upon the subject, and can only say that I shall

be very happy if you succeed in establishing your title. It is, however, a great comfort to me in my present situation to mingle my tears with yours over the memory of the best of godmothers, as she was to you, and the best of friends, as I *always found her*. Clover deserves all you say of it: no place can be sweeter or more comfortable. I have enjoyed better health since I resided here than in any former period of my life. Permit me to add that, *in the present posture of affairs*, should either your business or pleasure bring you down to this part of the country, it will give me only too much pleasure to receive you; and I think I may even venture, my dear sir, to offer you a shake-down, if you do me the favour of a visit.

“I am, my dear Mr. Windfall,

“Yours very sincerely,

“SIMPLICIA WILY.”

“P.S. Excuse me sending you by the railway a cauliflower or two, with a few Brussels sprouts.”

The present of his own vegetables, and the offer of the shake-down in his own house, were probably the portions of this letter that most poignantly affected Mr. Windfall. Altogether, however, it completed what the revelations made by Mr. Robinson had begun, and gave the unlucky proprietor of Clover, not only the sharpest, but the longest fit of the gout he had ever been visited with. He was confined to his room or his couch for a calendar month, so that it was past the middle of July when he was in a condition to make another move in the cause ; all which time, of course, was clear gain to Mrs. Wily, which we need hardly say she turned to the very best advantage. The strawberries were particularly fine that year, and the widow gave a very pretty and agreeable strawberry fête to the young people of the neighbourhood ; which added greatly to her popularity ; and led many to hope that she would eventually (by some process or another) turn possession into right, and by hook or by crook make the cottage her own.

On two different occasions during this period of uninterrupted enjoyment, Mrs. Wily was so considerate as to send Mr. Windfall a few of the Clover strawberries. Fortunately, however, Mr. Robinson happened on each occasion to be at Bloomsbury Buildings to prevent the relapse which these delicate but galling attentions would have infallibly caused, had they been communicated to Mr. Windfall. This friendly office Mr. Robinson performed in a very simple way, by eating the strawberries up himself.

CHAPTER X.

ANOTHER STEP IN THE CAUSE.

It was on the 18th of July that Mr. Windfall went out for the first time, to see Mr. Blunt again by appointment: having previously, however, transmitted to the attorney both the widow Wily's letter and a copy of his own production, which he had been careful to keep by him.

Poor gentleman ! nothing showed how low he was than that he had laid aside the wide-awake, as if almost despairing of ever being a cottager or a country gentleman ; and he still rather hobbled than walked, with one of his legs swathed up as big as three, and every now and then experiencing one of those sharp pangs which survive attacks of the gout, like the bitter days that occasionally come with an east wind, even after summer has regularly set in. Mr. Windfall

had a paper in his hand ; the attorney desired to know whether it was a document in the cause, another letter from the widow,—but it was only a medical certificate to the effect that a few months of the country air would be highly expedient after his confinement, and particularly recommending the air of Hampshire.

“ Why not accept the widow’s hospitable invitation, my dear sir ? ” said Mr. Blunt ; “ she offers you a shake-down, why not accept it ? ”

Mr. Windfall experienced one of the shooting pangs we have just mentioned, at this unpleasant reminiscence.

“ Now did you ever read such a correspondence as that in all your life, Mr. Blunt ? ”

The two letters were lying before Mr. Blunt upon his desk.

“ Very bad, indeed,” said the attorney.

“ Did you ever read a more improper letter ? ”

“ Never, Mr. Windfall, never.”

“ I am glad to hear you say so,” said Solomon ; “ mine was a pretty good one, I think.”

“ Yours !—why I’m speaking of yours, man ! ”

“ Mine, Mr. Blunt ! ”

“ Yours, Mr. Windfall !—The widow’s was capital—the best letter I ever read in my life.”

“ Why, but it gave me this confounded fit of the gout.”

“ Just because it was so good.”

“ It gave me this foot, sir.”

“ Oh, indeed, Mr. Solomon, you put your foot in it.”

“ You desired me to write a polite friendly letter, and I did so.”

“ Did I desire you to throw a doubt on your own title, eh ? The widow hit the blot beautifully. She deserves Clover, and long may she inhabit and enjoy it.”

“ You are a most extraordinary man, Mr. Blunt. Did I not speak of the strength of my claims ? ”

“ Which nobody ever does but a man who has some doubts of his rights.”

“ You ought to have written the letter yourself, Mr. Blunt.”

“ So it seems.”

Mr. Windfall looked exceedingly blank for a

few moments, and then feebly inquired what was to be done?

"Nothing," said the solicitor. "Take all the fruit and vegetables you can get, and be thankful for getting anything out of your cottage."

Solomon was stung by this,—it warmed him, it made him eloquent.

"Is there no law," he exclaimed, "to meet such a case as mine? Can a party, male or female, occupy my house against my will? Can she refuse to go out after I give her notice to quit? Can she use my furniture, eat my chickens, kill my rabbits, enjoy my grounds, consume my fruit and my vegetables? Can a party do all this? Can she, Mr. Blunt?—that's the question, Mr. Blunt."

At every clause in this series of indignant interrogations, delivered with a vigour almost reaching to oratory, the gold-headed cane descended with an emphatic thump on the floor of the office, expressive of Mr. Windfall's strong sense of the cogency of his reasoning.

Mr. Blunt's reply was very brief:

“The widow Wily does it, does she not?”

“Of course she does.”

“Then I think a party *can*, Mr. Windfall.”

“And no remedy, no help, no redress?”

“I should be happy to serve you,” said the attorney, “as a friend of Mr. Robinson’s. Now what do you propose that I should do?”

“Well,” said Mr. Windfall, cheering up a little, “we tried grass and it failed, let us now try stones. Write to her yourself, Mr. Blunt, in the character of my attorney-at-law.”

“It shall be done,” said Mr. Blunt, and the client and solicitor parted.

CHAPTER XI.



THE ATTORNEY AND THE WIDOW.

MR. BLUNT had a dry formal reverend old conducting clerk who, he thought, would write the sort of a letter the case required better than he could do it himself; accordingly he sent for Mr. Withering and gave him the requisite instructions.

This was a mistake on Mr. Blunt's part: "to err is human," not even honest attorneys are exempt, he should have written the letter himself; but let us not anticipate.

When the dry old Mr. Withering appeared, he inquired what the style of the letter was to be.

"Plain," said Mr. Blunt, "as plain as possible, formal, very formal—precise, but full—no ambiguity—no mistake."

“Post ? ” said the monosyllabic Mr. Withering.

“Go down yourself by the railway,” answered the attorney ; “Clover is not far from town,—it will only take a few hours, and I should wish you to deliver it to the defendant with your own hand.”

Mr. Withering retired to his private den, and composed a letter of which he was so proud, that he read it over twice with not a little pomposity for the edification of the junior clerks, and then made one of them copy it into his book of precedents. It is only necessary, however, to place upon record here, a single passage : that in which “Simplicia Wily, widow, was required to surrender on a certain day therein named the cottage of Clover in the county of Hampshire, with all lands, premises, messuages, offices, gardens, orchards, woods, forests, meadows, warrens and fisheries, thereto in any wise belonging or appurtenant, to Solomon Windfall Esquire, lawful and rightful owner of the same, in default whereof on her part, the law would take its course against her, her executors, or adminis-

trators, with all the usual and unpleasant consequences of judgment, costs, executions and so forth"—an array of terrors that might well daunt the courage of the stoutest widow in all England.

It was dusk, almost dark, on the loveliest of evenings that ever concluded a day in July, when Mr. Withering, who had not often an opportunity of seeing so much of the country, arrived at the railway-station nearest to Clover, and set out on foot for his destination.

Is it possible to conceive in the wide world a human being in a position more strongly contrasted with his habits, ideas, associations, and antecedents, than an ancient attorney's clerk in a delicious rural scene by the light of a summer moon? Fancy, then, Mr. Withering, long, dry, and formal, as one of his own most formal documents, treading over the charming green lanes that led to Clover Cottage, he who had dwelt in Chancery Lane for the greater part of half-a-century, and whose experience of the woods and forests was limited to a sober Sunday walk in Kensington Gardens. The moon, the trees, the

birds, the flowers, the smells, were all novelties; and being of a timid constitution, the solitude discomposed rather than soothed him, the distant barking of a dog made him uneasy, and his mind was alternately filled with visions of robbers and wild beasts.

In this state of his faculties, the sound of nimble footsteps behind him was at once comforting and alarming. An honest companion would be welcome, but it seemed at least equally probable, at that place and hour, that a companion of another character might be desirous to overtake him. The uncertainty, however, was of short duration. He was joined in a few seconds by a young man whose rosy and radiant countenance, even imperfectly seen as it was, dispelled every idea of distrust, although a certain picturesqueness of costume might have been a little suggestive of the sentimental bandit of a melodrama.

With a merry ringing voice, the stranger accosted Mr. Withering, the beauty of the evening affording a convenient excuse for commencing

a way-side conversation. After the interchange of a few remarks on the moon and the weather, the old clerk, not being cock-sure that he was in the right path to Clover, asked his lively companion if he knew the house of a Mr. Windfall in that neighbourhood.

“No;” replied the other, “I do not even remember to have ever heard the name, and yet I think I know most of the houses for twenty miles round about.”

“Perhaps, sir, you may know, or have heard of Clover Cottage, then,” said Mr. Withering.

“Know Clover!—I should think I do,” said the other laughing; “why, man, I am going there this moment—going to sup there.”

“Very odd,” said the clerk, “you should know Clover so well, and never have heard of Mr. Solomon Windfall.”

“Windfall—Solomon Windfall—well, now I reflect, I do think I have heard the name,” said the other, “in some kind of connection with Clover.”

“A tolerably close connection, I believe,” said Mr. Withering.

"He is only the owner, or something of that sort," said our friend Florio, who has of course been fully recognised long since.

"That's all," said Mr. Withering drily, and with difficulty restraining the feelings with which he heard "ownership" spoken of as if it constituted one of the most insignificant incidents of property.

"That's all," said Mr. Withering; "only the owner, only the proprietor in fee simple."

"I know nothing of legal quibbles," said his companion; "do you know what my opinion of lawyers is?"

"No," said Mr. Withering.

"Very much the same, then, as Dick's, the butcher, in one of Shakespeare's historical plays—you know perhaps what Dick proposes to do with them?"

Mr. Withering did not remember, having probably never known.

"The first thing we do, says Dick; let's hang all the lawyers."

"And does he support his opinions by any

reasons ? ” Mr. Withering begged to be informed.

“ His friend Jack Cade gives the reasons,” replied Florio. “ Is not this, says he, a lamentable thing, that of the skin of an innocent lamb should be made parchment ; and that parchment being scribbled over should undo a man ? — There’s more to the same effect — admirable doctrine it is in my opinion, — for my part I only value the lamb for two things : first, because he is useful in poetry as an emblem of innocence, and a rhyme for calm, and secondly, for his valuable contributions to the kitchen ; — we are to have a delicious fore-quarter roasted for supper this very night at Clover, with young potatoes and green peas — but, perhaps, you are bound for Clover yourself, friend, you seem so interested about it ? ”

“ Truly I am going there,” said the clerk ; “ but, unluckily, not for supper. I am the bearer of a letter to the widow Wily, the very lady you are going to sup with on roast lamb.”

“ An invitation, probably ? ” said the poet.

“ Why, yes,” said Mr. Withering, after a

moment's pause, "it is an invitation;" but he was too cunning, of course, to specify what description of invitation it was.

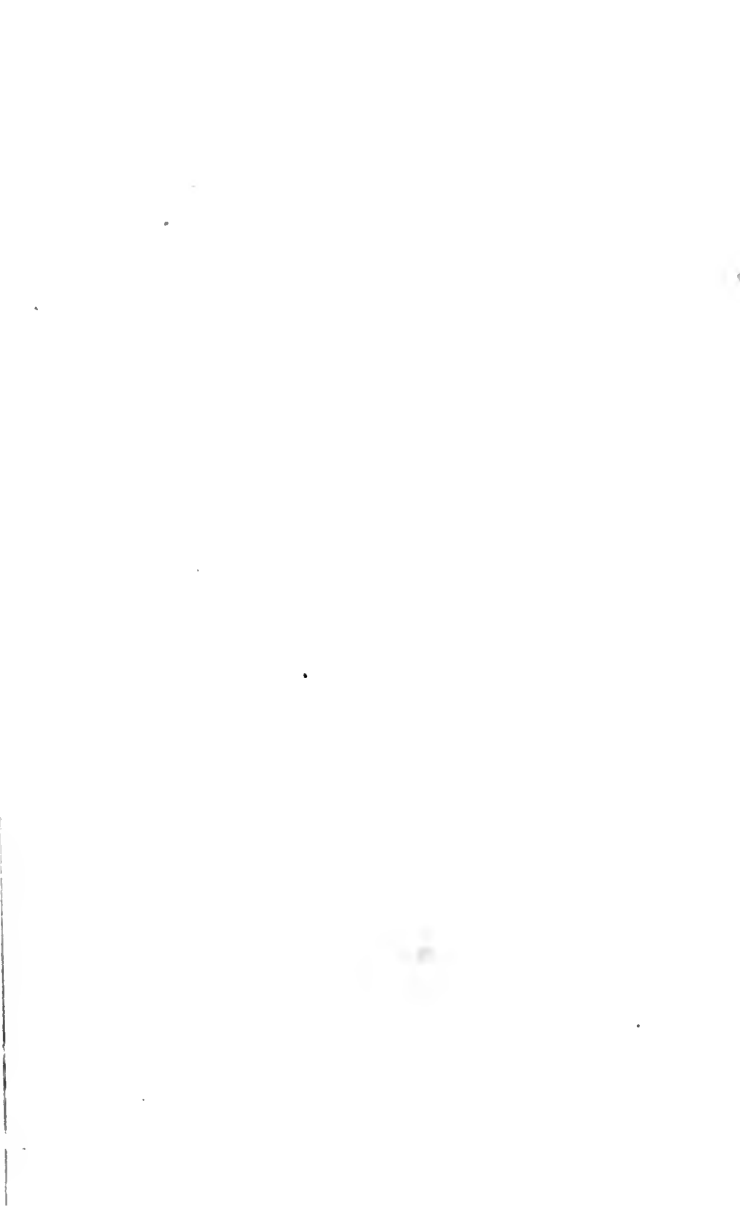
"I'll deliver it for you," said Florio, obligingly, "and save you some trouble."

"Thanks, sir," said the other, "but I must deliver it to the widow in person."

"Oh, very well," said the poet, "then you had better follow the lane about a quarter of a mile further, until you come to the green door in the hedge on your right hand side. There is a shorter and rougher path over this stile which I always take myself: so here I must bid you good night."

Just at the stile there happened to be a considerable opening in the trees, so that there was no longer anything to intercept the rays of the moon, which shone with her full fair face on Mr. Withering's yellow one, and enabled his companion for the first time to see his features distinctly.

It was impossible to look at Mr. Withering without making a very good guess at his vocation.





Florio penetrated his secret with a single glance, and laughing said, with his foot on the stile:

"I hope, sir, I have not offended you by the freedom of my remarks on the practitioners of the law, for being a little of a physiognomist, I am much mistaken if you are not yourself one of the fraternity."

Poor Mr. Withering was struck dumb by this shrewd detection of what he would fain have most carefully kept from the stranger's knowledge, not only because he was plainly one of the widow's faction, but because he was sure to reach the cottage first, and give warning of the enemy's approach.

However, the discovery was made—there was no help for it. Florio had jumped across the stile and disappeared, laughing lustily, down a steep bank, while the clerk was meditating what to reply.

Deeply chagrined at this unlucky incident, and vexed with himself for having been so unguardedly communicative, Mr. Withering at last reached the door in the hedge, and pulled the

wire which he found attached to it, with but faint hopes of receiving an answer.

The only answer, in truth, was the barking of dogs—a noise he particularly disliked—and sounds of distant merriment and laughter, the nature and occasion of which it was only too easy to conjecture.

Mr. Withering had ample time to study the beauties of the cottage and all about it; and there was just verdure enough left in his old heart, after thirty years of pettifogging and desk-work, to set it feebly throbbing again, perhaps for the last time, at the mingled aspect of loveliness and comfort which characterised the scene before him.

The nightingales were singing most musically: the moon was “round as my shield,” and Clover never looked so lovely as in the light of a full-moon. One side of the little glen lay deep in the shadow, but the other side and the cottage itself were flooded with the silver rays, so that every beautiful detail was brought out in perfection, and the thought occurred to Mr. Wither-

ing, that occurred to everybody who had ever stood on the same spot,—“If this were mine, would I not keep possession of it, if I could, against all the lawyers and claimants in the world?”

But the very thought recalled the grave clerk from his momentary sentimental reverie, and he pulled the bell a second time with more vigour than before.

Again the same distant and inarticulate sounds of barking and laughing were the only response.

He pulled again, and so energetically that he heard the ringing of the bell itself. Now the laughing became more distinct, and the bell seemed also to have excited the dogs, for they barked with redoubled spirit.

Presently he could distinguish voices, and that of his late companion among the number,—at least he thought so. The voices seemed to be employed in restraining the dogs.

“Down Lion!”

“Don't let Tiger loose.”

“I can't hold him.”

“Down Lion, down Tiger, good Tiger down.”

The height of the gate and hedge not being sufficient, in Mr. Withering's opinion, to protect him from these formidable dogs, should they escape from the persons who (to do them justice) seemed trying to control them, he flung his letter into the letter-box attached to the door, and in extreme agitation between anger and alarm retreated expeditiously from before the gates of the fortress.

CHAPTER XII.



NOCTES CLOVERIANÆ.

MR. WITHERING intended to return by the way he came, but in his trepidation he made a mistake, and, after wandering about for nearly half-an-hour, he found himself, to his surprise, under the very eaves of the cottage from which he had been repulsed; for the rere of Clover looked into one of the labyrinth of lanes amidst which it was situated, and was only separated from the path by a low hedge of privet and sweet-briar.

Mr. Withering was no eavesdropper, but repeated peals of merriment drew his attention, and it was impossible to resist taking a pretty long peep at the scene which immediately presented itself to his gaze through the thin white curtains of a parlour, from which the voices and joyous sounds issued. Only for the curtains, he

would have had a full view of the jovial party, which the companion of his evening walk was hastening to join ; and indeed, notwithstanding the impediment, he was able to distinguish that personage playing a prominent part with his knife and fork, and thought he could even see the roast lamb smoking on the table.

This happened to be one of the very snuggest of the widow's "*Noctes Cloverianæ*," as Florio had appropriately named them. It was a party of six. Beside the fair mistress herself, and her Fidelia, there were the Poet, the two Caterans, husband and wife, birds of Mrs. Wily's own feather ; and a well-fed gentleman in black, probably the rector or vicar of the parish, so that the pastoral interest was doubly represented. Two well-attired and neat-handed maidens were acting as Hebe and Ganymede to the worshipful company ; one handing the well-filled plates, the other crowning the glasses or goblets with a variety of bright and exhilarating beverages. Coursing each other round the board, and caressed by everybody in turn, were

two small dogs, one a little spaniel, and the other a Skye terrier: could these be the Lion and Tiger which had shaken poor Mr. Withering's nerves so grievously? There was but too much reason to think so; though it might have been open to doubt whether those were their proper names, or only *soubriquets* given them on the spur of the moment. The widow herself was easily distinguished by the gaiety of her mourning, the coquetry of her cap, the vivacity of her manners, and the roguish sparkling of her eyes, which attracted and fascinated Mr. Withering even through all the folds of the white muslin. She had something in her hand, which at first he took for a handkerchief or napkin, but, in fact, it was Mr. Blunt's, or rather his clerk's letter, which she was reading in the most humorous manner, making her guests shake with laughing, instead of throwing them into consternation, and depriving them of their appetites. The letter was then handed successively to the Poet and Mr. Cateran, who seemed to comment on it in turn, each, no doubt, in his own peculiar vein of

pleasantry, for the mirth increased every moment. Then Mopsa was seen bustling round the board, filling the glasses of the revellers to the brim with some bright liquor or another, and the Friar Tuck of the gang (if, indeed, the gentleman in black was of the clerical profession) rose and proposed a toast, probably the health of the buxom hostess herself, for she seemed agitated with joyous emotions, which communicated themselves even to her ribbons and muslins, and made her appear to quiver all over with social glee. Then Mrs. Wily was unanimously solicited to sing; the Poet being the most zealous and eloquent of the petitioners. She did sing, and though Mr. Withering did not very distinctly hear the words of the melody, which was "They may rail at this earth," he was so bewitched by the performance, that he was very near expressing his raptures aloud, and discovering himself to the party. Indeed, he now thought that he had been playing Paul Pry a little too long, particularly as the night was rapidly advancing, and he was accordingly on the

point of going his way, when the sonorous but sweet voice of his friend Florio arrested his attention, and he felt an irresistible curiosity to hear the song of that rather loose-principled gentleman before he took his leave. In consequence of the remarkable distinctness of the Poet's utterance, Mr. Withering was able to catch almost every word of the ballad, or whatever it was, which he favoured the company with, and which was no doubt written by him expressly for the occasion. The reader will easily conceive how much such a strain as the following must have added to the shock which Florio's conversation had already given to Mr. Withering's legal morality.

A SONG OF POSSESSION.

I.

Dull questions of Title let lawyers discuss,
The blissful Possession's sufficient for us,
The Power to enjoy is worth all other Powers,
No Property surely is Real but ours.

II.

Yes, ours are the joys of the hearths and the homes,
While Title in pride and in poverty roams;

Our chairs in a circle we cosily draw,
And drink merry healths to the Owner in Law.

III.

Nine Muses of old did the poets inflame,
For us our Nine cardinal points do the same ;
Our Nine we have still better cause to admire,
Who keep us at once both in food and in fire.

IV.

Does the carolling bird, or the murmuring bee,
Care who is the owner in Tail, or in Fee.
The bees and the birds, like ourselves, have no brain
For dry legal quibbles and points of chicane.

V.

Those sticklers for Rights, who Possession disturb,
Some law ought to punish, some statute should curb ;
This life is too short to be spent in the brawls
Of your Lincoln's Inns and your Westminster Halls.

VI.

Estates are like rose-trees, and carry like them,
Together both roses and thorns on their stem ;
Possession's the rose which your bosom adorns,
You care not who plucks or Possesses the thorns.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WIDOW FILES HER ANSWER TO THE
ATTORNEY'S BILL.

NEXT morning, Mr. Blunt was alternately irritated and diverted by the report of Mr. Withering's proceedings and adventures. Mr. Withering related all the events of the evening, with the minutest circumstantiality, dwelling particularly upon the festivities he had witnessed, and the unprincipled ballad which he had heard sung.

"However," said the attorney, "I am glad you delivered the letter at all events. The defendant's answer will be a guide to us. I doubt if the widow found it as amusing this morning at breakfast as she did last night at supper."

"It will make her uncomfortable, sir," said Mr. Withering, "depend upon it."

"What kind of a place is this Clover Cottage, Mr. Withering?"

"I'm greatly mistaken, sir," answered the clerk in professional language, "if the case of Windfall *versus* Wily, widow, will not be a very long time in the office."

"We shall see," said the honest attorney. He expected the widow's answer the following day, but no answer came; nor the following day; nor the day after that again. Mr. Blunt grew daily warmer, warmer, and warmer in his client's cause.

The repeated daily calls, too, of poor Mr. Windfall increased his provocation. The plaintiff was even a greater bore than the defendant. He was always stumping in with his gold-headed cane, to ask if there was an answer yet from the widow, and as he had resumed his "wide-awake," and sometimes even appeared of a morning in his new shooting-coat, his visits disturbed the solemn routine of the office, and interfered with the

transaction of business. One of the junior clerks, who had a genius for caricaturing, took a capital sketch of Mr. Windfall in his sporting attire, which upset the gravity of Mr. Blunt himself. However, when he ceased laughing, he rebuked the amateur artist, and admonished him not to exercise his talents in future upon his employer's clients.

Nearly a week elapsed without a word or a sign from the pretty usurper. Another week gained. The summer was going over; the weather growing hot, and Mr. Blunt getting hot along with it. At length he received the following reply in the informal shape of a lady's triangular note, which made him actually red :—

“ MRS. WILY presents her compliments to Mr. Blunt, attorney-at-law, and begs to acknowledge his letter of the 20th inst., the greater part of which she is totally unable to comprehend, not being conversant (happily for herself) in law matters. She is called on to restore Mr. Windfall such a variety of things that she really cannot but suspect Mr. Blunt must be joking in sending her

such a strange catalogue ; among other things she is required to surrender a forest and a message, indeed, several of them ; as to forests, there are none in this part of the country that she has ever heard of ; and as to the thing called a *message*, she would feel much obliged to Mr. Blunt to let her know what it is, as a necessary preliminary to her restoring it to Mr. Windfall, or anybody else. Besides, Mrs. Wily thinks it right to acquaint Mr. Blunt that she is in actual correspondence herself with Mr. Windfall on the subject of his claims to this property, and she can hardly bring herself to believe that gentleman capable, under such delicate circumstances, of not only directing an attorney to proceed against her, but authorising such an invasion of her privacy as she was subjected to a few evenings since, and which she begs may not be repeated."

"This is too bad," cried Mr. Blunt, throwing the note vehemently from him after he had read it, and striking the table with his knuckles ; "too

bad!—another blot!—and again the widow has hit it! Why did I not write myself? Mr. Withering, Mr. Withering—oh, Mr. Withering!”

Mr. Withering appeared.

“Read that!”

“These widows, these widows,” muttered poor Mr. Withering to himself as he perused Mrs. Wily’s note;—the very shape of which he looked upon as a deliberate insult.

“I wanted a plain letter, Mr. Withering,” said the solicitor with more melancholy in his tone than displeasure;—“there was no occasion for your forests and messuages:—see the advantage you have given the enemy!”

“You did say *plain*, sir; but you also said *formal*, and *very formal*;—I followed our best precedents *in pari materia*.”

“Too bad, too bad! to be baffled in this way, —take care, for your life, not to let the plaintiff see either our letter or the defendant’s answer; after the abuse I gave poor Mr. Windfall for *his* production, it would never do to let him see that we have been not much more successful.”

"All the widow wants is time," said the chop-fallen clerk.

"To be sure, to be sure; but time is everything,—the summer is going over and she is enjoying it in my client's house and at his expense. Here is a poor simple gentleman kept out of his cottage and his farm by this audacious little widow; he has invited his friends for the first of September to shoot partridge with him; he has got a fit of the gout in the cause already; he is ordered by his doctors to go to the country, and his country-house is shut in his face: there seems, too, to be quite a gang of them; they have got even their Friar Tuck.—I won't stand it a day longer—this is a case of gross injustice, and I won't submit to it;—I feel, I do by Jupiter, as if I was the plaintiff myself; (except that I hope I am not an ass,) and I'll see him righted, Mr. Withering;—no widow shall triumph over me. Pull baker, pull devil; pull widow, pull attorney;—we shall see whether John Blunt, or Simplicia Wily, carries the day."

"What do you propose doing, sir."

"I'll go myself," said Mr. Blunt.

"Will you excuse my making an humble suggestion, sir," said Mr. Withering.

"Of course,—always glad to have the benefit of your judgment and experience."

"Then, sir, it occurs to me there is only one way of managing this business satisfactorily, and that is by uniting the two adverse interests:—the plaintiff is a bachelor, sir, and the defendant a widow."

"That's my thunder," cried the attorney. "I threw out the hint to Mr. Robinson: but there's no use in thinking of it, the old fellow is such an inveterate woman-hater, and has got such a mortal dread of widows in particular."

"He has been used ill by the widows," said the clerk.

"But how did such a gay notion occur to *you*, Mr. Withering?—you have been in this office for twenty years, and this is the first bit of romance or sentiment I ever heard from your lips."

"Leaning, sir, on the gate of Clover Cottage

that evening, in the moonlight, listening to the nightingales."

"Upon my word a very likely situation to inspire one with such an idea," said Mr. Blunt with a hearty laugh.

CHAPTER XIV.

UTTER DARKNESS OF MR. WINDFALL'S PROSPECTS.

THE prospects of Mr. Windfall were just now very dark indeed, but they were destined to grow darker still, in consequence of the unfortunate incidents which we have now to record. Mrs. Wily was not satisfied with turning Mr. Blunt's flank in the manner described in the last chapter, but she aimed a too successful blow at the *entente cordiale* subsisting between attorney and client, by the following short note which she addressed to Mr. Windfall, of the same date as her reply to his solicitor.

"MY DEAR SIR.

"I have received a very improper communication from a gentleman of the name of Mr. Blunt, professing to act upon your behalf.

I feel confident you have not authorised a letter of the kind, and I think it right to apprise you of it, that the same impropriety may not be repeated.

“I remain, my Dear Sir,

“Yours sincerely,

“SIMPLICIA WILY.”

Mr. Windfall had felt annoyed for some days at the dry answers which he always got, when he called at Mr. Blunt's office—sometimes from the clerks, sometimes from the attorney himself; so that he was greatly out of humour, and not unprepared to learn that an improper letter had been sent to the widow, and thought himself called on as a gentleman immediately to disclaim it. Accordingly he sat down and wrote the following short answer.

“MADAM,

“You only do me justice in believing me incapable of authorising such a letter as you

inform me you have received from Mr. Blunt. I beg most distinctly and entirely to disavow it.

“I have the honour, Madam, to remain

“Your obedient servant,

“SOLOMON WINDFALL.”

The widow having received this reply, lost no time in dispatching it to the attorney, with the following few words of her own in the envelope.

“MRS. WILLY encloses Mr. Blunt a letter she has just received from her friend, Mr. Windfall. It will show Mr. B. that she was right in her impression that Mr. W. had not sanctioned the extraordinary communication of which she has had so much cause to complain.”

Upon receiving this, Mr. Blunt's indignation with his client may be imagined. Without a moment's delay, he wrote to Mr. Windfall as follows :—

“SIR,

“As I find you are not only in personal communication with the lady against whom you

employed me to act as your solicitor, but that you actually take it upon you to disapprove and disavow my proceedings in your behalf, I have no alternative but to inform you that I will have no more to do with the business of a gentleman capable of such improper and unwarrantable conduct.

“Your obedient servant,

“JOHN BLUNT.”

Mr. Windfall was as much astonished and confounded by this note as if he had not provoked it by his own folly. He went immediately in quest of Mr. Robinson.

“Read that !” he said to his friend, when he found him, throwing down Mr. Blunt’s letter on the table before him, and hardly able to speak with agitation.

“A pretty kettle of fish,” said Robinson, after reading the note.

“I’ll have no more to do with honest attorneys,” said Mr. Windfall, with his emphatic thump of the cane.

“Solomon, this comes of your foolish meddling. Why can't you keep yourself quiet?”

Mr. Robinson took the matter very seriously; he began now really to fear that September would come without the possession of Clover and the shooting-party.

“When it was proper for you to write to this crafty widow, it was almost impossible to get you to do it; and now that, having an attorney, it is positively wrong for you to hold any intercourse with her, you have involved yourself, it seems, in a regular correspondence.”

Mr. Windfall was unable to speak, he was so nervous, and there was so much justice in his friend's reproaches.

“What could have induced you,” pursued the relentless Robinson, “to disclaim anything done, said, or written by your solicitor?—eh, Solomon, most wise Solomon, answer me that.”

Robinson paused for a reply, and when at length he got it, it sufficed, confused as it was, to show him pretty clearly how matters really stood.

“I see how it is—the widow set a trap for you, and you tumbled into it head foremost.”

“I did everything, Mr. Robinson, with the best intentions: from the first to the last in this unfortunate business, I have acted with the best and most honourable intentions.”

“You ‘meant well,’ like Master Slender in the play,—so now, my dear friend, I must only do what I can to set matters right; but Blunt is a man of warm temperament: you have given him just cause of offence, and it may not be very easy to pacify him. However, I’ll go to him at once; there is no time to be lost.”

“Do, Robinson; do, my dear Robinson.”

“And do you go home, Solomon, and stay as quiet as a mouse. I almost wish you had another fit of the gout, and in the hand, to keep you from letter-writing.”

When Mr. Robinson called at Mr. Blunt’s office, in less than half-an-hour after this dialogue, he was informed that the solicitor had gone to the north of England, on business likely to detain him for a month. This was a tre-

mendous blow. Mr. Robinson went away, looking nearly as rueful as his friend Solomon had looked himself in the gloomiest hours of his long struggle with fortune and the widow.

CHAPTER XV.



THE OLD CRONIES.

CLOVER Cottage was now become a standing joke with the majority of Mr. Windfall's friends, particularly those whom he had invited to shoot there with him in September, a period which was now not very remote. Nay, more, more than one of these gentlemen began to suspect that either no such cottage at all existed, or at least that Solomon Windfall had no valid right to it.

"Where's this Clover?—in what county?"—asked old Jonathan Powderham one day, at "The Old Cronies," sitting with several more of the Windfall party in a semicircle round the fire.

"Faith," said Colonel O'Trigger, in reply, "I am not particularly well made up in the geography of *Air-shire*."

“There are cottages in the air as well as castles in the air,” said Mark Aimwell.

“Our friend Solomon will hardly be in Clover on the first of September, at all events,” said Toby Bagshot.

“We’ll spind the faste of Next-never-come-tide with him there,” said the Irish Colonel—he was a Colonel in the Balruddery Militia, M.P. for Botherall, and pretended to be a lineal descendant of the celebrated Sir Lucius, of the same name.

“I fancy,” resumed Jonathan Powderham, “our friend’s title is none of the soundest.”

“It stands to reason,” said Mr. Bagshot, “that if his right was clear he would have established it before this, particularly with John Blunt for his solicitor. The truth is, I suppose, old Mrs. Silverspoon’s will was no will at all; not properly witnessed, perhaps; or the old lady was not of sound and disposing mind.”

“Mr. Blunt has thrown the case up,” said Mark Aimwell.

“There it is!” said Bagshot. “Everybody

knows Mr. Blunt will have nothing to do with any case that's not strictly honest and honourable. Solomon Windfall has no more right to the cottage than I have."

"At all events," said Powderham, "we had all better look out for another engagement for the First of September."

"I'd invite every mother's son of ye to my bit of a castle on the Shannon," said O'Trigger, "only that they sould it upon me the other day in the Incumbered Estates Court, and the divil a bit of it is mine at this moment at all, at all."

"Why don't you show the Commissioners up in the House, Colonel?"

"Och, they never listen to the Irish Mimbers talking," said the Member for Botherall. "We are tired of wasting our sweetness on the desert air; it wouldn't much surprise me, some fine morning, if we were all with one consint to come to a unanimous resolution *nem. con.* to make our motions and give our votes in indignant silence."

"Move for a return," said Bagshot.

“ If they would only return me the halls of my forefathers, I’d forgive them,” answered the senator; “ but to tell you the honest truth, and no lie in it, I don’t expect to get into O’Trigger Castle again until the day that Solomon Windfall gets into Clover Cottage; so as I see nothing better to do, gentlemen, I’ll just accept the invitation of my bosom friend, the Earl of Derby, and spend the shooting sayson at his box in Tipperary.”

CHAPTER XVI.



FAIR FRIENDS AGAIN IN COUNCIL.

AT Clover itself, after the little stir that Mr. Withering's mission and the attorney's letter made had subsided, the fact of Mr. Windfall's existence seemed almost to have been forgotten. Nothing disturbed the deep tranquillity of that sweet valley but the succession of innocent festivities of which the cottage was the scene, under the auspices of the clever, daring, and successful little widow. Her "noctes" were celebrated with the greatest regularity; the poetical effusions of Florio were becoming so numerous, that he was meditating a publication of them, with the title of *Musæ Cloverianæ*, to be dedicated, of course, to the lady whose charms and hospitalities had inspired them. The hampers of fowls and vegetables went up regu-

larly twice a week to the Caterans in town ; and the most active preparations were on foot to give a suitable reception to the gallant captain and brave lieutenant returning from the Crimea, and no doubt by this time at no great distance from the shores of England.

Now and then, perhaps, there would come over the mind of the fair widow, like a little cloud over a bright sky, a disturbing thought of the instability of fortune ; or a remark casually met with in a book on the eventual though tardy triumph of honesty over fraud, would ruffle for a few minutes her sweet serenity. She would sometimes dream of John Thrustout, in the person of a gouty old gentleman in a wide-awake, with a gun on his shoulder. Sometimes a stranger, perhaps a passing tourist, pausing on the brow of the hill to regale his eye with the prospect, would fright the household from their propriety, and Mopsa would fly to the green door, to secure it against an expected invasion. Sometimes Fidelia would suddenly see, as it were, the apparition of Mr. Windfall,

or the "reversioner," as Mr. Cateran had nicknamed him, and give her friend a momentary shock by mentioning him apropos of something or nothing.

One morning, for instance, while Fidelia was gathering flowers to fill the vases in the drawing-room, she had Mr. Windfall before her eyes the whole time; she could not cease thinking of him; and as this led to a curious and important dialogue between the widow and her friend, we think it right to relate what passed.

"Only think of that dry, inveterate old bachelor," murmured Fidelia to herself, "calling this lovely garden his own, and all these roses and pinks. I dare say he cares no more for flowers than I do for guns and pistols; probably he will have them all rooted up, and cabbages and onions planted in their stead."

"Who, my dear?" asked Mrs. Wily, who was seated at a little distance, under an acacia, with the Skye terrier crouching at her feet, half hid under her petticoats.

"Oh, I'm thinking of that tiresome, trouble-





some, encroaching, old Mr. Windfall. The notion of his supplanting you in a dear place like this, which seems just made for a sweet nice creature like you, and would be quite thrown away upon him, provokes me more than I can tell, whenever I think of it."

"Then don't think of it, Fidelia, love," said the widow.

"Sometimes I cannot help it, Simplicia; I have not my thoughts under such control as you have; when there is a disagreeable thing to think of, I must think of it—at least to-day I can't think of anything else. I have his ugly face always before me."

"How curious you should always call him old and ugly," said the widow, "when he is neither the one nor the other;—at least neither *very* old nor *very* ugly. That's his picture, you know, in the spare bed-room. It was done for his godmother not more than four years hence, and really it is the picture of a tolerably good-looking man."

"I declare, Simplicia, I do think you are the

strangest creature in the world," said Fidelia, approaching with her hands full of flowers, and sitting down at the widow's side under the acacia: "and if you *have* a fault, it is that you are a great deal too amiable. You seem to take a particular pleasure in saying kind and good-natured things of Mr. Windfall, and he—I might almost say, your natural enemy."

Mrs. Wily smiled benevolently, and, almost in a devout tone, hoped she had not an enemy in the world.

"I admit," she said, after a moment's pause, "that Mr. Windfall *was* a little troublesome lately; but he is acting extremely well at present, and has no notion, I am certain, of molesting me, at least until the end of the autumn. But now, my love, let us change the subject, if you please, and talk of our grand fête for the First of September."

"Do let me say one word more, Simplicia."

"Well, Fidelia?"

"I wish your brother-in-law, Mr. Cateran, would not joke as he sometimes does about you

marrying Mr. Windfall. It makes me quite uncomfortable. Shocking as it would be to see him in possession of Clover, it would be infinitely worse (at least to me) to see him in possession of you, my dear."

"You foolish thing," said the widow, "to mind anything Tom Cateran says."

"I hope he is only joking, I'm sure; but it provokes me, my love, and I can perceive it annoys somebody else still more."

"Who?—Florio?"

"Yes, I *do* mean Florio."

"And what signifies it whether it annoys him or not?"

"Well, I am sure, my dear, if you were to marry again, which I hope you will some time or another, I should a thousand times rather see you married to Florio than to Mr. Windfall."

"Marry a poet!—" exclaimed Mrs. Wily, with all her charming shrewdness flashing from both her eyes; "but really, Fidelia, I don't see why I should marry either one or the other, and now I must fly, for the sun is getting too hot."

Mrs. Wily rose so ' abruptly that it really seemed as if she did not wish to continue the conversation longer, after the matrimonial turn it had taken ; and her friend remained in the garden arranging her flowers, and beginning for the first time to suspect that the idea of a match with the proprietor of Clover was by no means the most disagreeable one that had ever been presented to the widow's mind.

CHAPTER XVII.



MR. WINDFALL'S FORTUNE BEGINS TO SMILE.

IT is a "wise saw" supported by a great many "modern instances," as well as ancient, that when things come to the worst they mend; a truth which is sometimes figuratively expressed by the remark, that the darkest moment of the night is that which immediately precedes the first rosy streak of dawn.

The Windfall case now looks as gloomy as ever a case looked. He is not only deserted by his attorney, but seems to be abandoned by justice herself. "Be just and fear not" is to him a poetical illusion. That "honesty is the best policy," he is prepared to deny on the authority of his own melancholy experience. In vain he calls his own his own. In vain for him the law proclaims that every wrong has its remedy. His

has none. In vain he appeals to the will of Mrs. Silverspoon. The will of Jupiter seems to have set it aside as effectually as a judgment of the Prerogative Court. The red republican's definition of property is the only one that meets the case of Clover Cottage.

“ Qu'est-ce que c'est que la propriété ? ”

“ C'est un vol.”

We have already seen with regret how well disposed all the poor gentleman's friends at the Old Cronies are to forsake him in his adversity ; to call the righteousness of his cause—nay, the very existence of the subject-matter of it—into question. It is with still greater pain we have now to mention that not even Mr. Robinson himself was steady in his affections in this hour of bitterness and trial—even the faithful heart of Robinson wavered ; he was already thinking of the coming September and its sports with reference to new stubbles, and his spirit, like that of Lycidas, was wandering among “ other groves and other streams.”

A curious circumstance, however, recalled his

mind to Clover, just when he was on the point of forgetting that such a little paradise had ever bewitched his imagination. Happening one day to be left by his evil genius to his own resources at dinner-time, Mr. Robinson called upon Mr. Windfall, and prevailed upon him to forget his sorrows for a few hours, and accompany him to the Cock and Pie tavern, a house famed among other things for rabbits smothered in onions—a partiality to which dish was, as we have already mentioned, an hereditary weakness in the house of Windfall. There, having previously agreed that the name of Clover was not to be breathed by either of them, they were making themselves as comfortable as it was possible for men to do who have to pay for their dinners, when two young men, in military undress, with exceedingly fierce moustaches, came in and took possession of the box and table just behind them. They were not in the room five minutes before they took pains to let everybody present know that they were just returned from before Sebastopol. Our friends paid them very little attention; they

had some excellent mulligatawny soup before them, and were not to be diverted from it by a pair of self-crowned conquerors, whose laurels had evidently not been purchased with their blood. The young men, however, were talking in a key that made every word they said distinctly audible, particularly by persons only separated from them by a low partition, and who were speaking in the subdued tone that so well harmonised with Mr. Windfall's dejected spirits. For some time the conversation of the young officers was totally devoid of interest, except to themselves; but all of a sudden it took a turn which attracted the attention of their next neighbours, and before long made Mr. Windfall drop his fork which he had just stuck into the leg of a boiled rabbit.

"If this weather lasts, Dove," said one to the other, "we shall have a glorious First of September at Clover."

"Do you hear that, Robinson?"—Robinson with a frown and a shake of his head desired Mr. Windfall to keep himself quiet.

“This day week, Shunfield, my boy, we shall be popping at the partridges, instead of shooting the Cossacks.”

“Clover is a delightful spot, by all accounts.”

“I believe so: my sister finds it extremely comfortable, and if she takes my advice, she will settle there permanently.”

“Will she indeed!—permanently—will she?”—

“Hush, Solomon, hush—not a word out of your lips.”

“Is Clover absolutely her own?”

“Let us hear the answer to that now?”—whispered Mr. Robinson.

“Not strictly, I believe; but possession, you know, is nine points of law. There is a gentleman of the name of Windham, or Windfall, who pretends to have some title to the property.”

“Pretends!—Robinson do you hear?—pretends!—flesh and blood can’t—”

Robinson held him down, or he would have jumped up, and flung defiance at the Crimean heroes.

“I heard something about this Mr. Windfall from Tom Cateran, who knows him.”—

“Now we shall hear what your friend Cateran says of you,” said Mr. Robinson.

“Tom tells me, he is a gouty, selfish, old Sybarite, immensely rich, too rich to live in a cottage, or trouble himself about the odds and ends of his enormous property.”

“The rascal!—the rascal!” murmured poor Solomon, bitterly,—“too rich to live in a cottage—the rascal!”

“I don’t know,” said Captain Dove, “but my sister gives a very different account of him.”

There was no occasion to keep Mr. Windfall still; his curiosity to hear his own character sketched by Mrs. Wily was strong enough for the purpose.

“She has frequently mentioned him in her letters to the Crimea, and always with respect, indeed with affection; he seems to have made a favourable impression on her by his gentleman-like and handsome conduct with respect to the cottage: only think, he actually quarrelled with

his lawyers for urging him to eject her ; and, in fact, whatever his rights may be, he has never shown the least disposition to enforce them in any manner inconvenient or unpleasant to my sister."

"Come, Solomon,—there's compensation for you—there is good in that clever little widow after all,—but hush!"

"Oh, then," said Lieutenant Shunfield, "he must be a fine old cock, this Mr. Windfall, and an honour to human nature ; let us drink his health!"

"With all my heart," said the captain, filling his glass, "Mr. Windfall's health!"—

"Now let us pay our bill and go to the Hay-market."

As the young officers, in going out, passed the box where Mr. Windfall and his friend were seated, the former could not refrain from rising and bowing to them ; a civility, however, which they fortunately attributed to his recognition of their claims to universal homage, on the score of their recent services in the East. They returned

the worthy gentleman's salute with a dignity that showed how worthy they felt themselves of every possible distinction, and having twisted their moustaches, and lighted their cigars, they strode out of the Cock and Pie.

"Now I have got something to build on," cried Mr. Robinson, slapping the table.

"I am quite bewildered," said Solomon.

"Go home and go to bed," said the other,—
"I am greatly mistaken if I have not a plan prepared against to-morrow morning that will bring the great Clover question to a speedy and satisfactory issue. Do you go to bed and leave the rest to me."

CHAPTER XVIII.



MR. WINDFALL'S FRIENDS IN COUNCIL.

MR. ROBINSON having parted with his companion, went straight to the Old Cronies, where he knew very well he would be sure to find all Mr. Windfall's shooting party assembled on that particular evening.

"In the multitude of counsellors there is safety," said Robinson to himself:—"a saying of a wiser Solomon than my poor friend Windfall."

The counsellors in requisition were all in their usual haunt, even Colonel O'Trigger himself, notwithstanding the engagement to his friend the Earl of Derby.

"What's in the wind now?"—cried old Jonathan Powderham, seeing the brow of Robinson pregnant with momentous matters.

“Windfall’s in the wind,” said Robinson, nodding to the semicircle.

They all laughed.

“Clover’s in the wind,” continued Robinson.

The Cronies all laughed again.

“We have given up Clover long ago,” said Mark Aimwell.

“Forgotten all about it,” said Bagshot.

“I’m off to my noble friend’s sate in the morning,” said the Colonel of the Balruddery Militia.

“No, you are not, Colonel!”—said Robinson.

“Not!”—exclaimed the Colonel indignantly.

“No,” said Robinson; “for I presume you are too polite to accept a gentleman’s invitation and break your engagement.—You are all engaged, like myself, to Solomon Windfall, to shoot partridge at Clover Cottage on the First of September.”

“Ha! ha! ha!” laughed Jonathan Powderham.

“He! he! he!” laughed Mark Aimwell.

“Hi! hi! hi!” laughed Toby Bagshot.

“Ho! ho! ho!” roared Colonel O’Trigger, and another “ho! ho! ho!” proceeded from a new

arrival, no other than Mr. Blunt, who had only that very day returned from the north.

“When you have all done laughing,” said Mr. Robinson calmly, “we will proceed to business.”

“How is your poor friend,” said Mr. Blunt; “I really sincerely pity him, although he treated me as ill as I was ever treated by a client.”

“Well enough in bodily health,” said Robinson, “low enough, of course, in spirits.”

“Who can administer to a mind disaised?” cried the Colonel.

“Poor fellow!” said Powderham.

“The victim of a monomania,” said Aimwell.

“I was talking this morning,” said Mr. Bagshot, “to a mad doctor, and he said he considered Mr. Windfall’s case a very peculiar one. It seems when men go mad on the subject of property, they generally imagine themselves possessed of palaces or castles; never of anything so humble as a cottage.”

“Curious,” said Jonathan Powderham.

“Natural,” said another.

“But that poor Mr. Windfall’s is a case of

lunacy, there can be no possible doubt," said a third.

"However, gentlemen," said Mr. Blunt; "since Mr. Robinson seems to have got something to say, we ought to hear him."

"Hear him! hear him!" cried the Irish M.P.

"Let us hear him, of course," cried everybody.

Mr. Robinson then related in full detail the scene at the Cock and Pie, and the extraordinary conversation he and Mr. Windfall had unintentionally overheard there between the two officers returned on "urgent private affairs" from the Crimea.

The circle was highly diverted, but nobody could conjecture what practical purpose the incident could be turned to.

"You see, gentlemen," said Robinson, "the Widow Wily is going to have *her* festive meeting on the First of September."

"That's plain enough. I only wish we were all invited;" said several of the company.

"I have a mind to invite my own self," said the Colonel.

“Go on, Robinson,” said Mr. Blunt,—“go on with your statement. What’s your plan?”

“What I propose is to go down in a body to Clover on the same day, Mr. Windfall and all of us, with our guns in our hands; invite ourselves to the widow’s feast, and then and there put our worthy friend in possession of his rightful property.”

“By Jupiter!” cried Mr. Blunt, “there’s a great deal of sense in that.”

“By St. Patrick, Robinson, you are no fool,” said the Colonel.

“Two shooting parties,” said Mark Aimwell, timidly, “I don’t like that idea exactly:—suppose a hostile collision!”

“And two Crimean officers on the other side!” said Jonathan Powderham, who was not much stouter than Mark Aimwell, notwithstanding that his name smelled of sulphur and nitre.

“Never mind the Crimean officers,” said Robinson; “I’ll answer for it they have more appetite for shooting partridges than shooting their fellow-creatures. Colonel O’Trigger would

rout a regiment of such heroes as Captain Dove and Lieutenant Shunfield."

"At the same time," said Mr. Blunt, "if the scheme is to be acted on at all, it must be managed in perfect good-humour, more like a scene in a little comedy, than an actual ejection by main force."

"I have no objection to offer," said Mr. Aimwell, "to the plan, as modified by Mr. Blunt."

"Nor I," said Toby Bagshot.

"Nor I," said Mr. Powderham.

"Lave it to me," said Colonel O'Trigger, "although as a gentleman and an Irishman, I would naturally prefer shooting the gallant Captain Dove and his comrade to any other way of settling the business; yet as we live in civilised times, and there's a lady in the case, we must keep our timpers, and be gentle as lambs, though as resolute as lions. I see the way before me as clearly as if it was the Hill of Howth. We'll all go down, as Jack Robinson proposes, with our guns and other accoutrements; we will then manœuvre about the fields, avoiding the foe, just

as the Crimean officers did the Rooshians, and take our divarsion until we hear the dinner-bell at the cottage ringing ; upon which Mr. Windfall will take the lead, and under his gallant conduct we will invade the premises, just as if we were all formally invited to dinner ; Mr. Windfall will introduce himself politely to the widow, and tell her that he and his friends have dropped in to take pot-luck with her.”

Here Mr. Blunt broke in with animation :—

“ One word,” he cried, “ apropos of pot-luck. Among the Clover papers in my possession at this moment is a letter, written by Mrs. Wily to Mr. Windfall, early in the proceedings, in which letter she actually gives him a general invitation to the Cottage, and not only offers him pot-luck, but a shake-down, gentlemen,” and he thumped the table with emphasis.

“ Capital ! better and better,” cried Colonel O'Trigger. “ We have the whole plan now completely organised :—a shake-down after the pot-luck—we'll sleep as well as dine in Clover ; and if our friend Mr. Windfall, being once in,

ever suffers himself to be put *out*, he doesn't deserve that half-a-dozen good fellows should be after taking so much pains to serve him."

"And more," said Mr. Blunt, "and it is a point which I wonder the Colonel, being an Irishman, has overlooked; I say, if he turns the widow *out* he will show himself unworthy of our friendship, and we'll leave him to himself in the next scrape he gets into."

"Marrying the widow I took to be a matter of course," said the Colonel, "and that was just the reason I said nothing about it."

"A very good reason it was," said Mr. Blunt. "And now, gentlemen, I think we ought to give Mr. Robinson and the Colonel a good supper, in testimony of our approval of the excellence of their advice in a matter which, I frankly admit, completely baffled my professional skill, while I acted as Mr. Windfall's solicitor."

"A widow was too much for an attorney,—no great wonder in that," said Toby Bagshot.

"There's not a subtler animal in the field than a pretty little thorough-bred English

widow," said the Colonel; "and as to the supper, gentlemen, I beg on my own behalf, as well as that of my honourable friend Mr. Robinson, to accept it in the handsomest manner. We'll drink to both the young widow and the old bachelor, not forgetting a bumper to our success on the First of September."

CHAPTER XIX.



THE CRISIS APPROACHES.

WHEN the First of September arrived it was a day worthy of the events that were destined to make it for ever memorable in the domestic annals of Clover. The interval that elapsed since the occurrences mentioned in the last chapter had been turned to the best account. Mr. Windfall underwent prodigious drilling at the hands of Mr. Robinson, Mr. Blunt, and Colonel O'Trigger, to make him perfect in the delicate part he had to perform; and those judicious gentlemen, well knowing that boldness is the best element of success, took care to imbue the mind of their pupil with a degree of confidence in himself which seemed actually to add several inches to his stature, and subtract the same number of years from his age. Arrayed

in full sporting costume, his double-barrelled gun on his shoulder, and his "wide-awake" prudently retrenched a little in the brim, so as no longer to tempt a caricaturist, Solomon Windfall presented a picture which equally surprised and gratified his brethren in arms. He really looked a not ill-chosen leader for as comely a knot of elderly sportsmen as ever sallied out of London on a splendid autumnal morning, to make the fields and woodlands ring with the sharp reports of their fowling-pieces. The bluff, hearty, vigorous Mr. Blunt, the erect and soldierly Jonathan Powderham, the stout-built and well-fed Robinson, the slight but active and elastic Aimwell, the burly Bagshot, and, though last not least, the tall and strapping descendant of Sir Lucius O'Trigger.

They had sent down their dogs the evening before to the Wild-Goose Inn, about a mile from Clover, and there also they had ordered a substantial breakfast to be ready for them at the reasonably early hour of ten o'clock. Strict directions had also been given to the servants

not to breathe Mr. Windfall's name, lest by chance it should reach the cottage, and put the hostile garrison on the alert.

Never had a substantial breakfast better justice done to it. Hams disappeared, sirloins vanished, eggs came and went in dozens, loaves in baskets, and cream in floods, so high were the spirits of the party, and their appetites, in consequence, so keen, independently of the effects of the transition from the smoky atmosphere of the metropolis to the pure air of the fields and groves.

But, notwithstanding the excellence of the breakfast, it was no sooner over than Mr. Blunt, being by virtue of his profession the most provident and circumspect of the band, mooted the serious question, whether their well-concerted scheme might not after all break down in a momentous particular, should it turn out that the dinner at the cottage was unequal to the additional strain upon it resulting from the addition of half-a-dozen unexpected guests to the widow's party.

This point was no sooner started, than they

all sat down again to discuss it with a gravity suited to its importance.

Mr. Windfall said he had very little apprehension on the subject, from all he had ever heard of the freedoms taken by the inhabitants of Clover with his rabbits and poultry, and the produce of his farm in general.

Toby Bagshot, one of the mightiest of men with his knife and fork, was of opinion that "nothing ought to be left to chance."

"Bagshot is right," said Mr. Robinson.

"Well, Blunt, what do you propose?"—said Mark Aimwell.

"We must send a spy into the camp," said the attorney, "and I would recommend for the service either Robinson or Bagshot; no man understands the quality of a dinner better than Jack, and as a judge of quantity no man living can compete with my friend Toby."

"Let Bagshot go," shouted the whole party. "Quantity before quality under existing circumstances."

Toby lost no time, but instantly changed his

shooting dress for an ordinary suit, and set out on his expedition.

It was short and successful. He had the good luck to fall in with the poet on his way to the Clover festivities, and received from him an actual copy of the bill of fare, which being now produced and read to the company left not a shade of doubt on the mind of any one as to the ample sufficiency of the entertainment. Mr. Windfall therefore immediately headed his little band of Spartans, and they struck boldly into the fields, at the same time discreetly avoiding the line of march which they had learned from another scout that Mrs. Wily's forces had already taken.

The shooting of that day was not very creditable on the whole to the "Old Cronies." Mr. Blunt brought down three brace of birds; Jonathan Powderham two and a half; Bagshot bagged only one brace and a couple of hares; O'Trigger massacred a family of rabbits; Robinson and Mark Aimwell did hardly anything. The most successful gun of all was Mr. Windfall's;





he slew as many partridge as Mr. Blunt, as many hares as Bagshot, and as many rabbits as the Colonel; but the truth was, there was a tacit agreement among his friends to give him the best of the day's sport, in order to keep him well up for the business of the evening.

Among other particulars, gleaned from Florio by Mr. Bagshot, was the exact dinner hour at the Cottage; this enabled the party to time their movements, and shape their course with such nicety, that precisely as the dinner bell rang, Mr. Windfall and his friends arrived at the little green door in the hedge; which they fortunately found open, the parson having just entered, and in his hurry to the banquet, forgotten to close it behind him.

The party advanced in the following order:—Mr. Windfall in the van, looking positively young and handsome, for air and exercise had given him the glow of perfect health; and his spirits (excited no less by his success as a sportsman, than by his feelings as the lord of the soil he trod on) were as buoyant as those of a young

bridegroom. Next to Mr. Windfall came Mr. Robinson and Mr. Blunt, marching side by side. Then Colonel O'Trigger alone in his glory. After the Colonel followed Jonathan Powderham and Toby Bagshot, as hungry as a brace of hawks, and thinking more of their dinners than of their friend Solomon's rights. Mark Aimwell brought up the rere, chagrined at his bad shooting, and railing alternately at the wildness of the partridge and the defects of his gun.

CHAPTER XX.



THE WAR ENDS IN A DRAWN BATTLE.

THE vigilant and affectionate Fidelia was the first to discover the invaders. Mrs. Wily was just in the act of marshalling her guests for dinner, when Fidelia rushed in, exclaiming—

“Simplicia, Simplicia! Mr. Windfall, Mr. Solomon Windfall!”

“Mr. Windfall!” repeated the widow, in extreme surprise; “but you must be mistaken, my dear. I am sure you are.”

“If it is not Mr. Windfall himself,” said Fidelia, “it is assuredly his ghost; or the picture in the spare bed-room has walked out of its frame.”

The poet ridiculed the notion of Mr. Windfall making his appearance at Clover, of all places in the world.

So did the Parson.

So did the Caterans.

So did Captain Dove and Lieutenant Shunfield.

So did everybody.

While they were all laughing at the notion of such an improbability, Mr. Windfall entered (considerably in front of his friends), and advancing courteously, with a radiant countenance and a graceful bow, to the astonished widow, introduced himself in a neat little prepared speech (the composition of Colonel O'Trigger), the peroration of which was that he had "too long postponed the pleasure of accepting Mrs. Wily's hospitable offer of pot-luck and a shake-down at Clover."

The widow now displayed all the proverbial tact and adroitness of her sex in quickly adapting themselves to any emergency, no matter how difficult and unexpected. Recovering her composure almost as soon as she had lost it, Mrs. Wily could hardly have welcomed her formidable guest more graciously, with more agreeable smiles, or in more hospitable tones, if she had

specially invited and been prepared to receive him.

Mr. Windfall then apologised briefly and slightly for the long train of friends he had brought with him; and certainly, as they filed in, one after the other, and made their obeisances to Mrs. Wily in succession, until she thought there was no end of them, it was enough to disturb the self-possession of the best-tempered matron who ever sat at the head of a table. Indeed nothing but the consciousness that her dinner was of a nature to stand the shock of such a host of unlooked-for guests could have enabled her to preserve her equanimity under circumstances so trying.

Mr. Windfall took very little notice, and that rather contemptuous, of Mr. Cateran; but when Captain Dove was presented to him, he shook him cordially by the hand, and congratulated him on his safe return from fighting the battles of his country. Captain Dove immediately recognised the gentleman who had saluted him at the Cock and Pie, and begged in his turn to present

his brother in arms, Lieutenant Shunfield, to whom also Mr. Windfall was exceedingly civil, recollecting in what handsome terms the Lieutenant had proposed his health.

There seemed no end to introductions and presentations. The poet and the parson were particularly anxious to be made known to Mr. Windfall. The widow thoroughly understood the interested motives that actuated those gentlemen, but prudently kept to herself the opinion she privately entertained of their time-serving conduct, and eagerness to worship the rising sun.

Toby Bagshot now got impatient for dinner, and poking Mr. Windfall in the ribs, desired him in a whisper to pull the bell, and order dinner, as he was now in his own house ; but Solomon was much too urbane to commit such a rudeness, and snubbed Bagshot very decidedly for his unmannerly hint. Presently, however, came Mopsa, in her holiday gown, and a cap all fluttering with pink ribbons, and proclaimed that dinner was on the board. Mr. Windfall now showed as much promptitude as Mrs. Wily had done before, for

although he refused to pull the bell as Mr. Bagshot had suggested, yet he thought he might now very properly and gracefully assume the place of master of Clover, by presenting his arm to the widow, and leading her to the dining-room.

Solomon got great credit from his friends for this stroke, which was entirely of his own imagining. It was a silent, and delicate, but at the same time, a most unambiguous announcement that the tables were turned completely upon his fair opponent.

Mrs. Wily, to do her simple justice, received the blow with the most charming submissiveness. It was evident by the look of calm resignation with which she took her place at the right hand of Mr. Windfall, at the head of the table, that from that moment she struck her colours, and considered herself only a guest in the beautiful cottage which had been so long her own.

The contest therefore having happily ended almost as soon as it was begun, the united parties spent a most harmonious and delightful evening.

Not an unpleasant word was said ; there were no disagreeable and hackneyed jests at the expense of parsons, poets, or attorneys ; no allusions to freebooters, which might possibly have hurt the feelings of some of the company ; or to “ urgent private affairs,” or bloodless laurels, by which others might have been offended. But as to refraining from little pleasantries on the subjects of old bachelors and pretty widows, that of course was impossible ; nobody either refrained himself, or expected others to refrain from those legitimate and irresistible topics. All, however, was in the best humour, if not in the most exquisite taste ; and a case of champagne, which Mr. Windfall had taken the liberty to add to the resources of the widow’s cellar, did not seriously diminish the glee of the meeting.

Mrs. Wily bore herself so admirably in her difficult position, put such an enchanting face on the business, and though deposed, looked so worthy to be the queen of the day, that she won all hearts as well as fascinated all eyes ; and it was with the greatest reluctance she was at length

permitted to withdraw with her small retinue of female friends.

Then burst forth all the hitherto somewhat subdued hilarity and enthusiasm of the party. Then indeed Rigour was "sent to bed" and "strict age and sour severity" sent after him.

Mr. Windfall himself, in a speech teeming with fun and gallantry, proposed the health of—"The charming tenant in possession."—nine times nine.

Then Captain Dove rose, and having returned thanks for the compliment paid his sister, asked leave to give—

"The spirited and high-minded proprietor in fee," which was drank with the same acclamation.

Thirdly rose the honest attorney, and in a most humorous and hearty strain, called upon the company to join him in what was more a sentiment than a toast,—“May the lesser estate merge in the greater, and may the Church speedily unite the conflicting interests!”

A toast so pointed as this made Mr. Windfall,

no doubt, very fidgety on his chair; but he had made up his mind to bear the waggeries of his friends, and he only laughed heartily at the innumerable jokes and pleasantries which everybody in turn fired off at him.

At last the poet was requested to contribute his share to the mirth, and, as usual, he was not unprepared to comply, for he had long since, in shrewd expectation of such a crisis, composed a ballad expressly for it. The following song therefore was generally believed to be an improvisation, and Florio received the compliments paid him under that impression with characteristic coolness and complacency.

WHAT is Life but a chace, both in country and town?
A game to pursue, or a prize to bring down.
This world after all 's but a huge round of sports,
In Church, or in Senate, in Camps, and in Courts.
Yes, all men are sportsmen, since each has his aim,
His business, or pleasure, his fortune, or fame.
What 's youth but a love-chace in boudoir, or bower?
What 's manhood? A hunt after riches or power.
The Lawyer's a Nimrod of ancient renown,
He hunts for his fees in his wig and his gown;
Grows keener and bolder the stiffer the fence,
Now leaps over justice, now flies over sense;

•

Akin to the fox, he is partial to vermin,
And never pulls up till he runs down the ermine.

The Parson is equally fearless and blythe,
In chase of a living, or hunting for tithe;
The Dean's in pursuit of his Bishop's old mitre,
The Bishop of one that is richer or brighter;
The race of preferment allows him no breath,
His lordship is sure to be in at the death.

The Member's a sportsman;—his gun is his vote,
He brings down a place, or he changes his coat.
The Minister hunts, we all know, with a pack,
Of Members themselves open-mouthed at his back.
He too has his game, which he follows from far,
A dukedom, a garter, a title, a star.

Our Heroes in red to no huntsman will yield,
Their fighting-days over, they still keep the field,
What fields of the foe with their own can compare!
A single step here is worth all the *steppes* there.
Promotion's as quick in the west as the east,
And here 'tis no Filder that orders the feast.

The Bard, upon Pegasus galloping by,
Is after a rhyme, sir, in full hue and cry;
The idlest of sports are his keenest pursuits,
Profusion of flowers and very few fruits.

Thus each has his game in this strange sporting life,—
Why, here's a sly bachelor after a wife!
We all must confess he took capital aim,
A buxom young widow is always fair game;
No shooting but her's could exceed his renown,
The bird as she dropped did the fowler bring down.
This world after all's but a hugo round of sport,
In Church and in Senate, Camp, Cottage, and Court.

The last stanza was encored and encored
again; but, while this was going on amidst

thunders of applause, Mr. Windfall, being no longer able to sit quiet, under such very broad allusions to the most delicate of all subjects, got up, affected to be lost in admiration of the moon, recommended a stroll in the garden, and would have proposed to join the ladies at tea, only that the proposal from him would assuredly have been misconstrued.

The feast of course could not be much longer protracted, though probably old Powderham and Toby Bagshot would have greatly preferred another bottle of Claret to the widow's Souchong. However, everybody rose, and then poor Mr. Windfall had reason indeed to wish himself with the ladies, or in some other safe asylum.

He got almost as many pokes in the ribs as there were jolly fellows in the room, and every poke was accompanied with a decisive intimation that he had only one course now to take, and that if he did not take it, he might as well make up his mind to quarrel with all his friends at once and for ever.

Mr. Blunt gave the first thrust ;—"If you

presume to turn that pretty widow out of Clover," said Mr. Blunt, "now that you have got into it yourself, I'll turn *you* out of it in turn—I'll find a flaw in your title—if there is not one in it, I'll make one—turn her out, sir, if you dare!"

Mr. Robinson came up next, and poking said—"Solomon Windfall!—if you don't do what we are all agreed you ought to do, respecting that beautiful young widow, I'll give you up, Solomon, altogether. I'll not spend the Christmas with you; I'll desert you at Easter; when the long vacation comes I'll not come with it;—in a word, Solomon, propose for the widow like a man, or if you don't—!"

Toby Bagshot vowed he would move his expulsion from the old Cronies. "I will, sir, as sure as my name is Toby Bagshot."

Mark Aimwell swore he would call Mr. Windfall out if he proved refractory.

Jonathan Powderham gave him a tremendous poke, with—"I say ditto to Mark Aimwell."

The parson vowed he would excommunicate him.

The poet swore he would make an example of him in the bitterest lampoon he ever composed.

The Crimean officers pledged themselves to kill him with no more scruple than if he were a Russian Grenadier. Captain Dove, in the excitement of the moment, and under the influence of the champagne, utterly forgot the reserve which his near relationship to Mrs. Wily should have imposed upon him, and was as zealous as any of Mr. Windfall's oldest friends.

And finally came Colonel O'Trigger. "Mr. Solomon Windfall," said the Colonel, with terrible solemnity, "I've just got a word to say to you as well as the rest;—now that you have come into your estate, we'll be all looking mighty sharp to see how you behave as a landlord. I hope, sir, you'll have the good sense to remember that 'property has its *duties* as well as its *rights*'; take a friend's advice, and don't begin by ejecting your tenantry, Mr. Windfall. If you have the incomprehensible baseness to serve notice to quit on that nice young widow, by holy Patrick and all the saints in glory, I'll forget I'm not in

Tipperary some fine morning, and I'll just pop at you through the rose bushes yonder with as little ceremony as if you were only a rabbit."

And the Colonel, suiting his action to this vigorous expression of his feelings, poked poor Mr. Windfall so vigorously under the midriff, that he almost tumbled head foremost into the drawing-room, through the door which Mopsa had just half opened to see whether there was any chance of the bottle ceasing to circulate at a reasonable hour.

There are writers who would infallibly add at least one more chapter, but *we* are more conscientious; and being satisfied that the reader's quick apprehension has already outstripped the speed of our pen, and gained a full view of the happy and necessary conclusion of Mr. Windfall's adventures, we feel that the author may here properly retire, and leave to the imagination of others all that remains to be told,—how the tedious formalities of courtship were almost

dispensed with; how the answer was popped as soon as the question was asked; how all the *dramatis personæ* graced the wedding; how punctually Mr. Robinson redeemed his pledge to spend all the holidays of the year with his hospitable friend; and how after feasting for many a year upon his own rabbits smothered in his own onions, and gathering his old comrades around him many a jolly First of September, Mr. Solomon Windfall was eventually served with a notice to quit which he was not at liberty to disobey, and making no defence to the action, left Clover Cottage once more in the sole possession of a comely and not inconsolable widow.

THE END.

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